

PRACTICAL PIETY;
OR,
THE INFLUENCE
OF THE
RELIGION OF THE HEART
ON THE
CONDUCT OF THE LIFE.

BY HANNAH MORE.

The love of God begins with the Heart, and purifies and rectifies; and from the Heart, thus refined, grows a conformity in the Life, in Words, with Actions.
In Matthew Hale's Contemplation.

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PREFACE.

AN eminent Professor of our own time modestly declared that he taught chemistry in order that he might learn it. The writer of the following pages might, with far more justice, offer a similar declaration, as an apology for so repeatedly treating on the important topics of religion and morals.

Abashed by the equitable precept,

Let those teach others who themselves excel—

she is aware, how fairly she is putting it in the power of the reader, to ask, in the searching words of an eminent old Prelate, “They that speak thus and advise thus, do they do thus?” She can defend herself in no other way, than by adopting for a reply the words of the same venerable Divine, which immediately follow—“O that it were not too true. Yet although it be but

little that is attained, ~~the~~ very aim is right, and something there is that is done by it. It is better to have such thoughts and desires, than altogether to give them up ; and the very desire, if it be serious and sincere, may so much change the habitude of the soul and life, that it is not to be despised."

The world does not require so much to be informed as reminded. A remembrancer may be almost as useful as an instructor ; if his office be more humble, it is scarcely less necessary. The man whose employment it was, stately to proclaim in the ear of Philip,
REMEMBER THAT THOU ART MORTAL, had his plain admonition been allowed to make its due impression, might have produced a more salutary effect on the royal Usurper, than the impassioned orations of his immortal assailant —

whose resistless eloquence
Shook th' arsenal, and fulminated over Greece,
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne.

While the orator boldly strove to check
the ambition, and arrest the injustice of the
King,

King, the simple herald barely reminded him, how short would be the reign of injustice, how inevitable and how near was the final period of ambition. Let it be remembered to the credit of the Monarch, that while the thunders of the Politician were intolerable, the Monitor was of his own appointment.

This slight sketch, for it pretends to no higher name, aims only at being plain and practical. Contending solely for those indispensable points, which, by involving present duty, involve future happiness, the Writer has avoided, as far as Christian sincerity permits, all controverted topics ; has shunned whatever might lead to disputation rather than to profit.

We live in an age, when, as Mr. Pope observed of that in which he wrote, it is criminal to be moderate. Would it could not be said that Religion has her parties as well as Politics ! Those who endeavour to steer clear of all extremes in either, are in danger of being reprobated by both. It is

rather a hardship for persons, who having considered it as a Christian duty to cultivate a spirit of moderation in thinking, and of candor in judging, that, when these dispositions are brought into action, they frequently incur a harsher censure, than the errors which it was their chief aim to avoid.

Perhaps, therefore, to that human wisdom whose leading object is human applause, it might answer best to be exclusively attached to some one party. On the protection of that party at least, it might in that case reckon ; and it would then have the dislike of the opposite class alone to contend against ; while those who cannot go all lengths with either, can hardly escape the disapprobation of both.

To apply the remark to the present case.—The Author is apprehensive that she may be at once censured by opposite classes of readers as being too strict, and too relaxed, —too much attached to opinions, and too indifferent about them ;—as having narrowed the broad field of Christianity by labouring

bouring to establish its peculiar doctrines ; — as having broken down its inclosures by not confining herself to doctrines exclusively ; — as having considered morality of too little importance, as having raised it to an undue elevation ; — as having made practice every thing ; — as having made it nothing.

While a Catholic spirit is accused of being latitudinarian in one party, it really *is* so in another. In one, it exhibits the character of Christianity on her own grand but correct scale ; in the other it is the offspring of that indifference, which, considering all opinions as of nearly the same value, indemnifies itself for tolerating all, by not attaching itself to any ; which, establishing a self complacent notion of general benevolence, with a view to discredit the narrow spirit of Christianity, and adopting a display of that cheap material, liberal sentiment, as opposed to religious strictness, sacrifices true piety to false candor.

Christianity may be said to suffer between two criminals, but it is difficult to determine by which she suffers most ; — whether by that uncharitable

uncharitable bigotry which disguises her divine character, and speculatively adopts the faggot and the flames of inquisitorial intolerance; or by that indiscriminate candor, that conceding slackness, which, by stripping her of her appropriate attributes, reduces her to something scarcely worth contending for ; to something which, instead of making her the religion of Christ, generalizes her into any religion which may chuse to adopt her.—The one distorts her lovely lineaments into caricature, and throws her graceful figure into gloomy shadow , the other, by daubing her over with colours not her own, renders her form indistinct, and obliterates her features. In the first instance, she excites little affection ; in the latter, she is not recognized.

The Writer has endeavoured to address herself as a Christian who must die soon, to Christians who must die certainly. She trusts that she shall not be accused of erecting herself into a censor, but be considered as one who writes with a real consciousness
that

that she is far from having reached the attainments she suggests ; with a heartfelt conviction of the danger of holding out a standard too likely to discredit her own practice. She writes not with the assumption of superiority, but with a deep practical sense of the infirmities against which she has presumed to caution others. She wishes to be understood as speaking the language of sympathy, rather than of dictation, of feeling rather than of document. So far from fancying herself exempt from the evils on which she has animadverted, her very feeling of those evils has assisted her in their delineation. Thus this interior sentiment of her own deficiencies, which might be urged as a disqualification, has, she trusts, enabled her to point out dangers to others.—If the patient cannot lay down rules for the cure of a reigning disease, much less effect the cure ; yet from the symptoms common to the same malady, he who labours under it may suggest the necessity of attending to it. He
may

may treat the case feckingly, if not scientifically. He may substitute experience, in default of skill : he may insist on the value of the remedy he has neglected, as well as recommend that from which he has found benefit.

The subjects considered in these Volumes have been animadverted on, have been in a manner exhausted, by persons before whose names the Author bows down with the deepest humility ; by able professional instructors, by piety adorned with all the graces of style, and invigorated with all the powers of argument.

Why then, it may be asked, multiply books which may rather incumber the Reader than strengthen the cause ?—“ That the old is better” cannot be disputed. But is not the being “ old” sometimes a reason why the being “ better” is not regarded ? Novelty itself is an attraction which but too often supersedes merit. A slighter drapery, if it be a new one, may excite a degree of attention.

attention to an object, not paid to it when clad in a richer garb to which the eye has been accustomed.

The Author may begin to ask with one of her earliest and most enlightened friends *— “Where is the world into which we were born?” Death has broken most of those connexions which made the honour and the happiness of her youthful days. Fresh links however have continued to attach her to society. She is singularly happy in the affectionate regard of a great number of amiable young persons, who may peruse, with additional attention, sentiments which come recommended to them by the warmth of their own attachment, more than by any claim of merit in the Writer. Is there not something in personal knowledge, something in the feelings of endeared acquaintance, which, by that hidden association, whence so much of our undefined pleasure is derived, if it does not impart new force to old truths, may excite a new interest in considering truths

* Dr. Johnson.

which

PREFACE.

which are known? Her concern for these engaging persons extends beyond the transient period of present intercourse. It would shed a ray of brightness on her parting hour, if she could hope that any caution here held out, any principle here suggested, any habit here recommended, might be of use to any one of them, when the hand which now guides the pen, can be no longer exerted in their service. This would be remembering their friend in a way which would evince the highest affection in them, which would confer the truest honour on herself.

Burley Wood, March 1st, 1811.

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PRACTICAL PIETY.

CHAP. I.

Christianity an Internal Principle.

CHRISTIANITY bears all the marks of a divine original. It came down from heaven, and its gracious purpose is to carry us up thither. Its Author is God. It was foretold from the beginning by prophecies which grew clearer and brighter as they approached the period of their accomplishment. It was confirmed by miracles which continued till the religion they illustrated was established. It was ratified by the blood of its Author. Its doctrines are pure, sublime, consistent. Its precepts just and holy. Its worship is spiritual. Its service reasonable, and rendered practicable by the offers of Divine aid to human weakness. It is sanctioned by the

promise of eternal happiness to the faithful, and the threat of everlasting misery to the disobedient. It had no collusion with power, for power sought to crush it. It could not be in any league with the world, for it set out by declaring itself the enemy of the world. It reprobated its maxims, it shewed the vanity of its glories, the danger of its riches, the emptiness of its pleasures.

Christianity, though the most perfect rule of life that ever was devised, is far from being barely a rule of life. A religion consisting of a mere code of laws might have sufficed for man in a state of innocence. But man who has broken these laws cannot be saved by a rule which he has violated. What consolation could he find in the perusal of statutes, every one of which, bringing a fresh conviction of his guilt, brings a fresh assurance of his condemnation. The chief object of the Gospel is not to furnish rules for the preservation of innocence, but to hold out the means of salvation to the guilty. It does not proceed upon a supposition, but
a fact;

a fact; not upon what might have suited man in a state of purity, but upon what is suitable to him in the exigencies of his fallen state.

This religion does not consist in an external conformity to practices which, though right in themselves, may be adopted from human motives, and to answer secular purposes. It is not a religion of forms, and modes, and decencies. It is being transformed into the image of God. It is being like-minded with Christ. It is considering him as our sanctification, as well as our redemption. It is endeavouring to live to him here that we may live with him hereafter. It is desiring earnestly to surrender our will to his, our heart to the conduct of his spirit, our life to the guidance of his word.

The change in the human heart which the Scriptures declare to be necessary, they represent to be not so much an old principle improved as a new one created; not educed out of the former character, but

infused into the new one. This change is there expressed in great varieties of language, and under different figures of speech. Its being so frequently described, or figuratively intimated in almost every part of the volume of inspiration, entitles the doctrine itself to reverence, and ought to shield from obloquy the obnoxious terms in which it is sometimes conveyed.

The sacred writings frequently point out the analogy between natural and spiritual things. The same spirit which in the creation of the world moved upon the face of the waters, operates on the human character to produce a new heart and a new life. By this operation the affections and faculties of the man receive a new impulse—his dark understanding is illuminated, his rebellious will is subdued, his irregular desires are rectified; his judgment is informed, his imagination is chastised, his inclinations are sanctified; his hopes and fears are directed to their true and adequate end. Heaven becomes the object of his hopes, an eternal separation

separation from God the object of his fears. His love of the world is transmitted into the love of God. The lower faculties are pressed into the new service. The senses have a higher direction. The whole internal frame and constitution receive a nobler bent ; the intents and purposes of the mind a sublimer aim ; his aspirations a loftier flight ; his vacillating desires find a fixed object ; his vagrant purposes a settled home ; his disappointed heart a certain refuge. That heart, no longer the worshipper of the world, is struggling to become its conqueror. Our blessed Redeemer, in overcoming the world, bequeathed us his command to overcome it also ; but as he did not give the command without the example, so he did not give the example without the offer of a power to obey the command.

Genuine religion demands not merely an external profession of our allegiance to God, but an inward devotedness of ourselves to his service. It is not a recognition, but a dedication. It puts the Christian into a new

state of things, a new condition of being. It raises him above the world while he lives in it. It disperses the illusions of sense, by opening his eyes to realities in the place of those shadows which he has been pursuing. It presents this world as a scene whose original beauty Sin has darkened and disordered, Man as a helpless and dependent creature, Jesus Christ as the repairer of all the evils which sin has caused, and as our restorer to holiness and happiness. Any religion short of this, any, at least, which has not this for its end and object, is not that religion which the Gospel has presented to us, which our Redeemer came down on earth to teach us by his precepts, to illustrate by his example, to confirm by his death, and to consummate by his resurrection.

If Christianity do not always produce these happy effects to the extent here represented, it has always a tendency to produce them. If we do not see the progress to be such as the Gospel annexes to the transforming power of true religion, it is not owing to any defect in

in the principle, but to the remains of sin in the heart ; to the imperfectly subdued corruptions of the Christian. Those who are very sincere are still very imperfect. They evidence their sincerity by acknowledging the lowness of their attainments, by lamenting the remainder of their corruptions. Many an humble Christian whom the world reproaches with being extravagant in his zeal, whom it ridicules for being enthusiastic in his aims, and rigid in his practice, is inwardly mourning on the very contrary ground. He would bear their censure more cheerfully, but that he feels his danger lies in the opposite direction. He is secretly abasing himself before his Maker for not carrying far enough that principle which he is accused of carrying too far. The fault which others find in him is excess. The fault he finds in himself is deficiency. He is, alas ! too commonly right. His enemies speak of him as they hear. He judges of himself as he feels. But, though humbled to the dust by the deep sense of his own

unworthiness, he is “ strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” “ He has,” says the venerable Hooker, “ a shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power.” His prayer is not for reward but pardon. His plea is not merit but mercy ; but then it is mercy made sure to him by the promise of the Almighty to penitent believers.

The mistake of many in religion appears to be, that they do not begin with the beginning. They do not lay their foundation in the persuasion that man is by nature in a state of alienation from God. They consider him rather as an imperfect than as a fallen creature. They allow that he requires to be improved, but deny that he requires a thorough renovation of heart.

But genuine Christianity can never be grafted on any other stock than the apostacy of man. The design to re-instate beings who have not fallen ; to propose a restoration without a previous loss, a cure where there was no radical disease, is altogether an incon-

incongruity which would seem too palpable to require confutation, did we not so frequently see the doctrine of redemption maintained by those who deny that man was in a state to require such a redemption. But would Christ have been sent "to preach deliverance to the captive," if there had been no captivity; and "the opening of the prison to them that were bound," had there been no prison, had men been in no bondage?

We are aware that many consider the doctrine in question as a bold charge against our Creator. But may we not venture to ask, Is it not a bolder charge against God's goodness to presume that he had made beings originally wicked, and against God's veracity to believe, that having made such beings he pronounced them "good?" Is not that doctrine more reasonable which is expressed or implied in every part of Scripture, that the moral corruption of our first parent has been entailed on his whole posterity; that from this corruption

they are no more exempt than from natural death?

We must not, however, think falsely of our nature; we must humble but not degrade it. Our original brightness is obscured, but not extinguished. If we consider ourselves in our natural state, our estimation cannot be too low; when we reflect at what a price we have been bought, we can hardly over-rate ourselves in the view of immortality.

If, indeed, the Almighty had left us to the consequences of our natural state, we might, with more colour of reason, have mutinied against his justice. But when we see how graciously he has turned our very lapse into an occasion of improving our condition; how from this evil he was pleased to advance us to a greater good than we had lost; how that life which was forfeited may be restored; how, by grafting the redemption of man on the very circumstance of his fall, he has raised him to the capacity of a higher condition than that which he has forfeited,

feited, and to a happiness superior to that from which he fell—What an impression does this give us of the immeasurable wisdom and goodness of God, of the unsearchable riches of Christ !

The religion which it is the object of these pages to recommend, has been sometimes misunderstood, and not seldom misrepresented. It has been described as an unproductive theory, and ridiculed as a fanciful extravagance. For the sake of distinction it is here called, *The Religion of the heart.* There it subsists as the fountain of Spiritual life ; thence it sends forth, as from the central seat of its existence, supplies of life and warmth through the whole frame ; there is the soul of virtue, there is the vital principle which animates the whole being of a Christian.

This religion has been the support and consolation of the ~~poor~~ believer in all ages of the Church. That it has been perverted both by the cloystered and the un-cloystered mystic, not merely to promote ab-

straction of mind, but inactivity of life, makes nothing against the principle itself. What doctrine of the New Testament has not been made to speak the language of its injudicious advocate, and turned into arms against some other doctrine which it was never meant to oppose?

But if it has been carried to a blameable excess by the pious error of holy men, it has also been adopted by the less innocent fanatic, and abused to the most pernicious purposes. His extravagance has furnished to the enemies of internal religion, arguments, or rather invectives, against the sound and sober exercises of genuine piety. They seize every occasion to represent it as if it were criminal, as the foe of morality; ridiculous, as the infallible test of an unsound mind; mischievous, as hostile to active virtue, and destructive as the bane of public utility.

But if these charges be really well founded, then were the brightest luminaries of the Christian Church—then were Horne, and Porteus,

Porteus, and Beveridge ; then were Hooker, and Taylor, and Herbert ; Hopkins, Leighton, and Usher ; Howe, Doddridge, and Baxter ; Ridley, Jewell, and Hooper ; — then were Chrysostome, and Augustine, the Reformers and the Fathers ; then were the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, then were the noble army of Martyrs, then were the glorious company of the Apostles, then was the Disciple whom Jesus loved, then was Jesus himself — I shudder at the implication — dry speculatists, frantic enthusiasts, enemies to virtue, and subverters of the public weal.

Those who disbelieve, or deride, or reject this inward religion, are much to be compassionated. Their belief that no such principle exists, will, it is to be feared, effectually prevent its existing in themselves, at least, while they make their own state the measure of their general judgment. Not being sensible of the required dispositions, in their own hearts, they establish this as a proof of

its impossibility in all cases. This persuasion, as long as they maintain it, will assuredly exclude the reception of divine truth. What they assert can be true in no case, cannot be true in their own. Their hearts will be barred against any influence in the power of which they do not believe. They will not desire it; they will not pray for it, except in the Liturgy, *where it is the decided language*: They will not addict themselves to those pious exercises to which it invites them, exercises which it ever loves and cherishes. Thus they expect the end, but avoid the way which leads to it; they indulge the hope of glory, while they neglect or pervert the means of grace. But let not the formal religionist, who has, probably, never sought, and, therefore, never obtained any sense of the spiritual mercies of God, conclude that there is, therefore, no such state. His having no conception of it is no more proof that no such state exists, than it is a proof that the cheering beams of a genial

genial climate have no existence because the inhabitants of the frozen zone have never felt them.

Where our own heart and experience do not illustrate these truths practically, so as to afford us some evidence of their reality, let us examine our minds, and faithfully follow up our convictions ; let us enquire whether God has really been wanting in the accomplishment of his promises, or whether we have not been sadly deficient in yielding to those suggestions of conscience which are the motions of his spirit ? Whether we have not neglected to implore the aids of that Spirit ; whether we have not, in various instances, resisted them ? Let us ask ourselves—have we looked up to our heavenly father with humble dependence for the supplies of his grace ? or have we prayed for these blessings only as a form, and having acquitted ourselves of the form, do we continue to live as if we had not so prayed ? Having repeatedly implored his direction, do we endeavour to submit ourselves to its guidance ?

guidance? Having prayed that his will may be done, do we never stoutly set up our own will in contradiction to his?

If, then, we receive not the promised support and comfort, the failure must rest somewhere. It lies between him who has promised, and him to whom the promise is made. There is no other alternative; would it not be blasphemy to transfer the failure to God? Let us not, then, rest till we have cleared up the difficulty. The spirits sink, and the faith fails, if, after a continued round of reading and prayer; after having, for years, conformed to the letter of the command; after having scrupulously brought in our tale of outward duties; we find ourselves just where we were at setting out.

We complain justly of our own weakness, and truly plead our inability as a reason why we cannot serve God as we ought. This infirmity, its nature, and its measure, God knows far more exactly than we know it; yet he knows that, with the help which

he

he offers us, we can both love and obey him, or he never would have made it our qualification for heaven. He never would have said, "give me thy heart" — "seek ye my face" — "add to your faith virtue" — "have a right heart and a right spirit" — "strengthen the things that remain" — "ye will not come to me that ye might have life" — had not all these precept, a definite meaning, had not all these been practicable duties.

Can we suppose that the omniscient God would have given these unqualified commands to powerless, incapable, unimpressible beings? Can we suppose that he would command paralyzed creatures to walk, and then condemn them for not being able to move? He knows it is true, our natural impotence, but he knows, because he confers, our super-induced strength. There is scarcely a command in the whole Scripture which has not either immediately, or in some other part, a corresponding prayer, and a corresponding promise. If it says in one place "get thee

a new

a new heart" — it says in another "a new heart will I give thee;" and in a third "make me a clean heart." For it is worth observing that a diligent enquirer may trace every where this threefold union. If God commands by Saint Paul "let not sin reign in your mortal body," he promises by the same Apostle, "Sin shall not have dominion over you;" — while, to complete the tripartite agreement, he makes David pray that his "sins may not have dominion over him."

The Saints of old, so far from setting up on the stock of their own independent virtue, seem to have had no idea of any light but what was imparted, of any strength but what was communicated to them from above. — Hear their importunate petitions! — "O send forth thy light and thy truth!" — Mark their grateful declarations! — "The Lord is my strength and my salvation!" — Observe their cordial acknowledgements! — "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!"

Though

Though we must be careful not to mistake for the divine Agency those impulses which pretend to operate independently of external revelation; which have little reference to it; which set themselves above it; it is, however, that powerful agency which sanctifies all means, renders all external revelation effectual. — Notwithstanding that all the truths of religion, all the doctrines of salvation, are contained in the Holy Scriptures, these very Scriptures require the influence of that Spirit which dictated them to produce an influential faith. This Spirit, by enlightening the mind, converts the rational persuasion, brings the intellectual conviction of divine truth conveyed in the New Testament, into an operative principle. A man, from reading, examining, and enquiring, may attain to such a reasonable assurance of the truth of revelation as will remove all doubts from his own mind, and even enable him to refute the objections of others; but this bare intellectual faith alone will not operate against his corrupt affections, will not cure his besetting

setting sin, will not conquer his rebellious will, and may not therefore be an efficacious principle. A mere historical faith, the mere evidence of facts with the soundest reasonings and deductions from them, may not be that faith which will fill him with all joy and peace in believing.

An habitual reference to that Spirit which animates the real Christian is so far from excluding, that it strengthens the truth of revelation, but never contradicts it. The word of God is always in unison with his spirit. His spirit is never in opposition to his word. Indeed that this influence is not an imaginary thing is confirmed by the whole tenor of Scripture. We are aware that we are treading on dangerous, because disputed ground ; for among the fashionable curtailments of Scripture doctrines, there is not one truth which has been lopped from the modern creed with a more unsparing hand ; not one, the defense of which excites more suspicion against its advocates. But if it had been a mere phantom, should we with such jealous

jealous iteration, have been cautioned against neglecting or opposing it? If the holy Spirit could not be “grieved,” might not be “quenched,” were not likely to be “resisted;” that very spirit which proclaimed the prohibitions would never have said “grieve not,” “quench not,” “resist not.” The Bible never warns us against imaginary evil, nor courts us to imaginary good. If then we refuse to yield to its guidance, if we reject its directions, if we submit not to its gentle persuasions, for such they are, and not arbitrary compulsions, we shall never attain to that peace and liberty which are the privilege, the promised reward of sincere Christians.

In speaking of that peace which passeth understanding, we allude not to those illuminations and raptures, which, if God has in some instances bestowed them, he has nowhere pledged himself to bestow: but of that rational yet elevated hope which flows from an assured persuasion of the paternal love of our heavenly Father; of that “secret

of the Lord," which he himself has assured us, "is with them that fear him;" of that life and power of religion which are the privilege of those "who abide under the shadow of the Almighty;" of those who "know in whom they have believed;" of those "who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit;" of those "who endure as seeing him who is invisible."

Some people reason as if it were the object of divine influences to blind and not to enlighten, to mislead and not to guide, to create confusion, not regularity, eccentricity, not order; while the opposite class actually convert this sacred agency into a disorderly principle. It is easy to talk of religion without this divine aid, but impossible to produce it. In the opposite case, it is not difficult to inflame the imagination, but it is very difficult to reform the heart.

Many faults may be committed where there is nevertheless a sincere desire to please God. Many infirmities are consistent with a cordial love of our Redeemer. Faith

CHAP. II.

Christianity a Practical Principle.

IF God be the Author of our spiritual life, the root from which we derive the vital principle, with daily supplies to maintain this vitality, then the best evidence we can give that we have received something of this principle, is an unreserved dedication of ourselves to the actual promotion of his glory. No man ought to flatter himself that he is in the favour of God, whose life is not consecrated to the service of God. Will it not be the only unequivocal proof of such a consecration, that he be more zealous of good works than those who, disallowing the principle on which he performs them, do not even pretend to be actuated by any such motive?

The finest theory never yet carried any man to Heaven. A Religion of notions

which occupies the mind, without filling the heart, may obstruct, but cannot advance the salvation of men. If these notions are false, they are most pernicious; if true and not operative, they aggravate guilt; if unimportant though not unjust, they occupy the place which belongs to nobler objects, and sink the mind below its proper level; substituting the things which only ought not to be left undone, in the place of those which ought to be done; and causing the grand essentials not to be done at all. Such a religion is not that which Christ came to teach mankind.

All the doctrines of the Gospel are practical principles. The word of God was not written, the Son of God was not incarnate, the Spirit of God was not given, only that Christians might obtain right views, and possess just notions. Religion is something more than mere correctness of intellect, justness of conception, and exactness of judgment. It is a life-giving principle. It must be infused into the habit, as well as govern in

in the understanding ; it must regulate the will as well as direct the creed. It must not only cast the opinions into a right frame, but the heart into a new mould. It is a transforming as well as a penetrating principle. It changes the tastes, gives activity to the inclinations, and, together with a new heart, produces a new life.

Christianity enjoins the same temper, the same spirit, the same dispositions on all its real professors. The act, the performance, must depend on circumstances which do not depend on us. The power of doing good is withheld from many, from whom, however, the reward will not be withheld. If the external act constituted the whole value of Christian virtue, then must the Author of all good be himself the Author of injustice, by putting it out of the power of multitudes to fulfil his own commands. In principles, in tempers, in fervent desires, in holy endeavours, consists the very essence of Christian duty.

Nor must we fondly attach ourselves to the practice of some particular virtue, or

value ourselves exclusively on some favourite quality; nor must we wrap ourselves up in the performance of some individual actions as if they formed the sum of Christian duty. But we must embrace the whole law of God in all its aspects, bearings, and relations. We must bring no fancies, no partialities, no prejudices, no exclusive choice or rejection, into our religion, but take it as we find it, and obey it as we receive it, as it is exhibited in the Bible without addition, curtailment, or adulteration.

Nor must we pronounce on a character by a single action really bad, or apparently good; if so, Peter's denial would render him the object of our execration, while we should have judged favourably of the prudent economy of Judas. The catastrophe of the latter who does not know? while the other became a glorious martyr to that Master whom, in a moment of infirmity, he had denied.

A Piety altogether spiritual, disconnected with all outward circumstances; a religion

of pure meditation, and abstracted devotion, was not made for so compound, so imperfect a creature as man. There have, indeed, been a few sublime spirits, not "touch'd but rap't," who, totally cut off from the world, seem almost to have literally soared above this terrene region; who almost appear to have stolen the fire of the Seraphim, and to have had no business on earth, but to keep alive the celestial flame. They would, however, have approximated more nearly to the example of their Divine Master, the great standard and only perfect model, had they combined a more diligent discharge of the active duties and beneficences of life with their high devotional attainments.

But while we are in little danger of imitating, let us not too harshly censure the pious error of these sublimated spirits. Their number is small. Their example is not catching. Their ethereal fire is not likely, by spreading, to inflame the world. The world will take due care, not to come in contact with it, while its distant light and

warmth may cast, accidentally, a not unuseful ray on the cold-hearted and the worldly.

But from this small number of refined but inoperative beings, we do not intend to draw our notions of practical piety. God did not make a religion for these few exceptions to the general state of the world, but for the world at large; for beings active, busy, restless; whose activity he, by his word, diverts into its proper channels; whose busy spirit is there directed to the common good; whose restlessness, indicating the unsatisfactoriness of all they find on earth, he points to a higher destination. Were total seclusion and abstraction designed to have been the general state of the world, God would have given men other laws, other rules, other faculties, and other employments.

There is a class of visionary but pious writers, who seem to shoot as far beyond the mark, as mere moralists fall short of it. Men of low views and gross minds may be said

said to be wise *below* what is written, while those of too subtle refinement are wise *above* it. The one grovel in the dust from the inertness of their intellectual faculties ; while the others are lost in the clouds by stretching them beyond their appointed limits. The one build spiritual castles in the air, instead of erecting them on the “ holy ground” of Scripture ; the other lay their foundation in the sand instead of resting it on the rock of ages. Thus, the superstructure of both is equally unfound.

God is the fountain from which all the streams of goodness flow ; the centre from which all the rays of blessedness diverge. All our actions are only good, as they have a reference to him : the streams must revert back to their fountain, the rays must converge again to their centre.

If love of God be the governing principle, this powerful spring will actuate all the movements of the rational machine. The essence of religion does not so much consist in actions as affections. Though right ac-

tions, therefore, as from an excess of courtesy, they are commonly termed, may be performed where there are no right affections ; yet are they a mere carcase, utterly destitute of the soul, and, therefore, of the substance of virtue. But neither can affections substantially and truly subsist without producing right actions ; for never let it be forgotten that a pious inclination which has not life and vigour sufficient to ripen into act when the occasion presents itself, and a right action which does not grow out of a sound principle, will neither of them have any place in the account of real goodness. A good inclination will be contrary to sin, but a mere inclination will not subdue sin.

The love of God, as it is the source of every right action and feeling, so is it the only principle which necessarily involves the love of our fellow-creatures. As man we do not love man. There is a love of partiality but not of benevolence ; of sensibility but not of philanthropy ; of friends and favourites, of parties, and societies, but not of

man collectively. It is true we may, and do, without this principle, relieve his distresses, but we do not bear with his faults. We may promote his fortune, but we do not forgive his offences ; above all, we are not anxious for his immortal interests. We could not see him want without pain, but we can see him sin without emotion. We could not hear of a beggar perishing at our door without horror, but we can, without concern, witness an acquaintance dying without repentance. Is it not strange that we must participate something of the divine nature, before we can really love the human ? It seems, indeed, to be an insensibility to sin, rather than want of benevolence to mankind, that makes us naturally pity their temporal and be careless of their spiritual wants ; but does not this very insensibility proceed from the want of love to God ?

As it is the habitual frame, and predominating disposition, which are the true measure of virtue, incidental good actions are no certain criterion of the state of the heart ;

for who is there, who does not occasionally do them? Having made some progress in attaining this disposition, we must not sit down satisfied with propensities and inclinations to virtuous actions, while we rest short of their actual exercise. If the principle be that of sound Christianity, it will never be inert. While we shall never do good with any great effect, till we labour to be conformed, in some measure, to the image of God; we shall best evince our having obtained something of that conformity, by a course of steady and active obedience to God.

Every individual should bear in mind, that he is sent into this world to act a part in it. And though one may have a more splendid, and another a more obscure part assigned him, yet the actor of each is equally, is awfully accountable. Though God is not a hard, he is an exact Master. His service, though not a severe, is a reasonable service. He accurately proportions his requisitions to his gifts. If he does not expect that one talent

talent should be as productive as five, yet to even a single talent a proportionable responsibility is annexed.

He who has said “ Give me thy heart,” will not be satisfied with less ; he will not accept the praying lips, nor the mere hand of Charity; as substitutes.

A real Christian will be more just, sober, and charitable than other men, though he will not rest for salvation on justice, sobriety, or charity. He will perform the duties they enjoin, in the spirit of Christianity, as instances of devout obedience, as evidences of a heart devoted to God.

All virtues, it cannot be too often repeated, are sanctified or unhallowed according to the principle which dictates them ; and will be accepted or rejected accordingly. This principle, kept in due exercise, becomes a habit, and every act strengthens the inclination, adding vigour to the principle and pleasure to the performance.

We cannot be said to be real Christians, till religion become our animating motive,
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our predominating principle and pursuit, as much as worldly things are the predominating motive, principle, and pursuit of worldly men.

New converts, it is said, are most zealous, but they are not always the most persevering. If their tempers are warm, and they have only been touched on the side of their passions, they start eagerly, march rapidly, and are full of confidence in their own strength. They too often judge others with little charity, and themselves with little humility. While they accuse those who move steadily of standing still, they fancy their own course will never be slackened. If their conversion be not solid, religion, in losing its novelty, loses its power. Their speed declines. Nay, it will be happy if their motion become not retrograde. Those who are truly sincere, will commonly be persevering. If their speed is less eager, it is more steady. As they know their own heart more, they discover its ~~deceitfulness~~, and learn to distrust themselves. As they become more humble in spirit.

spirit they become more charitable in judging. As they grow more firm in principle they grow more exact in conduct.

The rooted habits of a religious life may indeed lose their prominence, because they are become more indented. If they are not embossed it is because they are burnt in. Where there is uniformity and consistency in the whole character, there will be little *rchief* in an individual action. A good deed will be less striking in an established Christian than a deed less good in one who had been previously careless; good actions being his expected duty and his ordinary practice. Such a Christian indeed, when his right habits cease to be new and striking, may fear that he is declining: but his quiet and confirmed course is a surer evidence than the more early starts of charity, or fits of piety, which may have drawn more attention and obtained more applause.

Again; we should cultivate most assiduously, because the work is most difficult, those graces which are most opposite to our



natural

natural temper; the value of our good qualities depending much on their being produced by the victory over some natural wrong propensity. The implantation of a virtue is the eradication of a vice. It will cost one man more to keep down a rising passion than to do a brilliant deed. It will try another more to keep back a sparkling but corrupt thought, which his wit had suggested, but which his religion checks, than it would to give a large sum in charity. A real Christian being deeply sensible of the worthlessness of any actions, which do not spring from the genuine fountain, will aim at such an habitual conformity to the Divine image, that to perform all acts of justice, charity, kindness, temperance, and every kindred virtue, may become the temper, the habitual, the abiding state of his heart; that like natural streams they may flow spontaneously from the living source.

Practical Christianity, then, is the actual operation of Christian principles. It is lying on the watch for occasions to exemplify



them.

them. It is “exercising ourselves unto godliness.” A Christian cannot tell in the morning what opportunities he may have of doing good during the day; but if he be a real Christian, he can tell that he will try to keep his heart open, his mind prepared, his affections alive to do whatever may occur in the way of duty. He will, as it were, stand in the way to receive the orders of Providence. Doing good is his vocation. Nor does the young artisan bind himself by firmer articles to the rigid performance of his master’s work, than the indentured Christian to the active service of that Divine Master who himself “went about doing good.” He rejects no duty which comes within the sphere of his calling, nor does he think the work he is employed in a good one, if he might be doing a better. His having well acquitted himself of a good action, is so far from furnishing him with an excuse for avoiding the next, that it is a new reason for his embarking in it. He looks not at the work which he has accomplished; but



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on that which he has to do. His views are always prospective. His charities are scarcely limited by his power. His will knows no limits. His fortune may have bounds. His benevolence has none. He is, in mind and desire, the benefactor of every miserable man. His heart is open to all the distressed ; to the household of faith it overflows. Where the heart is large, however small the ability, a thousand ways of doing good will be invented. Christian charity is a great enlarger of means. Christian self-denial negatively accomplishes the purpose of the favourite of fortune in the fables of the Nursery :—If it cannot fill the purse by a wish, it will not empty it by a vanity. It provides for others by abridging from itself. Having carefully defined what is necessary and becoming, it allows of no encroachment on its definition. Superfluities it will lop, vanities it will cut off. The deviser of liberal things will find means of effecting them, which to the indolent appear incredible, to the covetous impossible. Christian beneficence

fidence takes a large sweep. That circumference cannot be small, of which God is the centre. Nor does religious charity in a Christian stand still because not kept in motion by the main spring of the world. Money may fail, but benevolence will be going on. If he cannot relieve want, he may mitigate sorrow. He may warn the inexperienced, he may instruct the ignorant, he may confirm the doubting. The Christian will find out the cheapest way of *being* good as well as of *doing* good. If he cannot give money, he may exercise a more difficult virtue; he may forgive injuries. Forgiveness is the economy of the heart. A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent. Forgiveness saves the expence of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirits. It also puts the soul into a frame, which makes the practice of other virtues easy. The achievement of a hard duty is a great abolisher of difficulties. If great occasions do not arise, he will thankfully seize on small ones. If he cannot glorify God

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by serving others, he knows that he has always something to do at home ; some evil temper to correct, some wrong propensity to reform, some crooked practice to straiten. He will never be at a loss for employment, while there is a sin or a misery in the world ; he will never be idle, while there is a distress to be relieved in another, or a corruption to be cured in his own heart. We have employments assigned to us for every circumstance in life. When we are alone, we have our thoughts to watch ; in the family, our tempers ; in company, our tongues.

It will be a test of our sincerity to our own hearts, and for such tests we should anxiously watch, if we are as assiduous in following up our duty when only the favour of God is to be obtained by it, as in cases where subordinate considerations are taken into the account ; and bring their portion of influence. We must therefore conscientiously examine in what spirit we fulfil those parts of our duty which lie more exclusively between our Creator and our conscience.



Whether

Whether we are as solicitous about our inward disposition as about the act of which that disposition should be the principle. If our piety be internal and sincere we shall lament an evil temper no less than an evil action, conscious that though in its indulgence we may escape human censure, yet to the eye of Omnipotence, as both lie equally open, both are equally offensive.

Without making any fallible human being our infallible guide, and established standard, let us make use of the examples of eminently pious men as incentives to our own growth in every Christian grace. A generous emulation of the excellencies of another is not envy. It is a sanctification of that noble excitement which stirred the soul of Themistocles, when he declared that the trophies of Miltiades prevented him from sleeping. The Christian must not stop here. He must imitate the Pagan hero in the *use* to which he converted his restless admiration, ~~which gave~~ him no repose till he himself became equally illustrious by services equally distinguished with those of his rival.

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But to the Christian is held out in the sacred volume not only models of human excellence but of divine perfection, What an example of disinterested goodness and unbounded kindness, have we in our Heavenly Father, who is merciful over all his works, who distributes common blessings without distinction, who bestows the necessary refreshments of life, the shining sun and the refreshing shower, without waiting, as we are apt to do, for personal merit, or attachment, or gratitude ; who does not look out for desert, but want, as a qualification for his favours ; who does not afflict willingly, who delights in the happiness, and desires the salvation of all his children, who dispenses his daily munificence, and bears with our daily offences ; who in return for our violation of his laws, supplies our necessities, who waits patiently for our repentance, and even solicits us to have mercy on our own souls !

What a model for our humble imitation, is that Divine Person who was clothed with
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our humanity ; who dwelt among us, that the pattern being brought near, might be rendered more engaging, the conformity be made more practicable ; whose whole life was one unbroken series of universal charity ; who, in his complicated bounties, never forgot that man is compounded both of soul and body ; who, after teaching the multitude, fed them ; who repulsed none for being ignorant ; was impatient with none for being dull ; despised none for being contemned by the world ; rejected none for being sinners ; who encouraged those whose importunity others censured ; who in healing sicknesses converted souls, who gave bread, and forgave injuries !

It will be the endeavour of the sincere Christian to illustrate his devotions in the morning, by his actions during the day. He will try to make his conduct a practical exposition of the divine prayer which made a part of them. He will desire, "To hallow the name of God," to promote the enlargement and "the coming" of the "kingdom" of

of Christ. He will endeavour to do and to suffer his whole will ; “to forgive,” as he himself trusts that he is forgiven. He will resolve to avoid that “temptation” into which he had been praying “not to be led;” and he will labour to shun the “evil” from which he had been begging to be “delivered.” He thus makes his prayers as practical as the other parts of his religion, and labours to render his conduct as spiritual as his prayers. The commentary and the text are of reciprocal application.

If this gracious Saviour has left us a perfect model for our devotion in his prayer, he has left a model no less perfect for our practice in his Sermon. This divine Exposition has been sometimes misunderstood. It was not so much a supplement to a defective law, as the restoration of the purity of a perfect law from the corrupt interpretations of its blind expounders. These persons had ceased to consider it as forbidding the principle of sin, and as only forbidding the act. Christ restores it to its original meaning,

meaning, spreads it out in its due extent, shews the largeness of its dimensions and the spirit of its institution. He unfolds all its motions, tendencies, and relations. Not contenting himself, as human Legislators are obliged to do, to prohibit a man the act which is injurious to others, but the inward temper which is prejudicial to himself.

There cannot be a more striking instance, how emphatically every doctrine of the Gospel has a reference to practical goodness, than is exhibited by St. Paul, in that magnificent picture of the Resurrection, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, which our Church has happily selected, for the consolation of survivors at the last closing scene of mortality. After an inference, as triumphant as it is logical, that because "Christ is risen, we shall rise also;" after the most philosophical illustration of the raising of the body from the dust, by the process of grain sown in the earth, and springing up into a new mode of existence; after describing the subjugation of all things to the Redeemer, and

his laying down the mediatorial Kingdom; after sketching with a seraph's pencil, the relative glories of the celestial and terrestrial bodies; after exhausting the grandest images of created nature, and the dissolution of nature itself; after such a display of the solemnities of the great day, as makes this world and all its concerns shrink into nothing: in such a moment, when, if ever the rapt spirit might be supposed too highly wrought for precept and admonition—the apostle wound up, as he was, by the energies of inspiration, to the immediate view of the glorified state—the last trumpet sounding—the change from mortal to immortality effected in the twinkling of an eye—the sting of death drawn out—victory snatched from the grave—then, by a turn, as surprising as it is beautiful, he draws a conclusion as unexpectedly practical as his premises were grand and awful:—“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Then at once, by another quick transition,

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reforting from the duty to the reward, and, winding up the whole with an argument as powerful as his rhetoric had been sublime, he adds, — “ forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord.”

CHAP. III.

**Mistakes in Religion.*

TO point out with precision all the mistakes which exist in the present day, on the awful subject of Religion, would far exceed the limits of this small work. No mention therefore is intended to be made of the opinions or the practice of any particular body of people; nor will any notice be taken of any of the peculiarities of the numerous sects and parties which have risen up among us. It will be sufficient for the present purpose, to hazard some slight remarks on a few of those common classes of characters which belong more or less to most general bodies.

There are, among many others, three different sorts of religious Professors. The religion of one consists in a sturdy defence of what they themselves call orthodoxy, an

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attendance on public worship, and a general decency of behaviour. In their views of religion, they are not a little apprehensive of excess, not perceiving that their danger lies on the other side. They are far from rejecting faith or morals, but are somewhat afraid of *believing* too much, and a little scrupulous about *doing* too much, lest the former be suspected of fanaticism, and the latter of singularity. These Christians consider Religion as a point, which they, by their regular observances, having attained, there is nothing further required but to maintain the point they have reached, by a repetition of the same observances. They are therefore satisfied to remain stationary, considering that whoever has obtained his end, is of course saved the labour of pursuit; he is to keep his ground without troubling himself in searching after an imaginary perfection.

These frugal Christians are afraid of nothing so much as superfluity in their love, and supererogation in their obedience. This kind of fear however is always superfluous,

but most especially in those who are troubled with the apprehension. They are apt to weigh in the nicely-poised scales of scrupulous exactness, the duties which must of hard necessity be done, and those which without much risk may be left undone ; compounding for a larger indulgence by the relinquishment of a smaller ; giving up, through fear, a trivial gratification to which they are less inclined, and snatching, doubtfully, as an equivalent at one they like better. The gratification in both cases being perhaps such as a manly mind would hardly think worth contending for, even were religion out of the question. Nothing but love to God can conquer love of the world. One grain of that divine principle dropping in would make the scale of self-indulgence kick the beam.

These persons dread nothing so much as enthusiasm. Yet if to look for effects without their predisposing causes ; to depend for Heaven on that to which Heaven was never promised, be features of enthusiasm, then are they themselves enthusiasts.

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The religion of a second class, we have already described in the two preceding chapters. It consists in a heart devoted to its Maker; inwardly changed in its temper and disposition, yet deeply sensible of its remaining infirmities; continually aspiring however to higher improvements in faith, hope, and charity, and thinking that "the greatest of these is *charity*." These, by the former class, are reckoned enthusiasts, but they are in fact, if Christianity be true, acting on the only rational principles. If the doctrines of the Gospel have any solidity, if its promises have any meaning, these Christians are building on no false ground. They hope that submission to the power of God, obedience to his laws, compliance with his will, trust in his word, are, through the efficacy of the eternal spirit, real evidences, because they are vital acts of genuine faith in Jesus Christ. If they profess not to place their reliance on works, they are however more zealous in performing them than the others, who, professing to depend on their good

deeds for salvation, are not always diligent in securing it by the very means which they themselves establish to be alone effectual.

There is a third class—the high-flown professor, who looks down from the giddy heights of Antinomian delusion on the other two, abhors the one and despises the other, concludes that the one is lost, and the other in a fair way to be so. Though perhaps not living himself in any course of immorality, which requires the sanction of such doctrines, he does not hesitate to imply, in his discourse, that virtue is heathenish and good works superfluous, if not dangerous. He does not consider that though the Gospel is an act of oblivion to penitent sinners, yet it nowhere promises pardon to those who continue to live in a state of rebellion against God, and of disobedience to his laws. He forgets to insist to others that it is of little importance even to believe that sin is an evil, (which however they do not always believe) while they persist to live in it; that to know every thing of duty except the doing it, is to offend God

God with an aggravation, from which ignorance itself is exempt. It is not giving ourselves up to Christ in a nameless, inexplicable way, which will avail us. God loves an humble, not an audacious faith. To suppose that the blood of Christ redeems us from sin, while sin continues to pollute the soul, is to suppose an impossibility; to maintain that it is effectual for the salvation, and not for the sanctification of the sinner, is to suppose that it acts like an amulet, an incantation, a talisman, which is to produce its effect by operating on the imagination and not on the disease.

The Religion which mixes with human passions, and is set on fire by them, will make a stronger blaze than that light which is from above, which sheds a steady and lasting brightness on the path, and communicates a sober but durable warmth to the heart. It is equable and constant; while the other, like culinary fire, fed by gross materials, is extinguished the sooner from the fierceness of the flame.

That religion which is merely seated in the passions, is not only liable to wear itself out by its own impetuosity, but to be driven out by some other passion. The dominion of violent passions is short. They dispossess each other. When religion has had its day, it gives way to the next usurper. Its empire is no more solid than it is lasting, when principle and reason do not fix it on the throne.

The first of the above classes consider prudence as the paramount virtue in Religion. Their antipodes, the flaming professors, believe a burning zeal to be the exclusive grace. They reverse Saint Paul's collocation of the three Christian graces, and think that the greatest of these is *faith*. Though even in respect of this grace, their conduct and conversation too often give us reason to lament that they do not bear in mind its genuine and distinctive properties. Their faith instead of working by love, seems to be adopted from a notion that it leaves the Christian nothing to do, rather than

than because it is its nature to lead him to do more and better than other men.

In this case, as in many others, that which is directly contrary to what is wrong, is wrong also. If each opponent would only barter half his favourite quality with the favourite quality of the other, both parties would approach nearer to the truth. They might even furnish a complete Christian between them, that is, provided the zeal of the one was sincere, and the prudence of the other honest. But the misfortune is, each is as proud of not possessing the quality he wants, because his adversary has it, as he is proud of possessing that of which the other is destitute, and *because* he is destitute of it.

Among the many mistakes in religion, it is commonly thought that there is something so unintelligible, absurd, and fanatical in the term conversion, that those who employ it run no small hazard of being involved in the ridicule it excites. It is seldom used but ludicrously, or in contempt. This arises partly from the levity and ignorance of the

censurer, but perhaps as much from the imprudence and enthusiasm of those who have absurdly confined it to real or supposed instances of sudden or miraculous changes from profligacy to piety. But surely, with reasonable people, we run no risk in asserting that he, who being awakened by any of those various methods which the Almighty uses to bring his creatures to the knowledge of himself, who seeing the corruptions that are in the world, and feeling those with which his own heart abounds, is brought, whether gradually or more rapidly, from an evil heart of unbelief, to a lively faith in the Redeemer ; from a life, not only of gross vice, but of worldliness and vanity, to a life of progressive piety ; whose humility keeps pace with his progress ; who, though his attainments are advancing, is so far from counting himself to have attained, that he presses onward with unabated zeal, and evidences, by the change in his conduct, the change that has taken place in his heart — such a one is surely as sincerely converted, and

and the effect is as much produced by the same divine energy, as if some instantaneous revolution in his character had given it a 'miraculous appearance. The doctrines of Scripture are the same now as when David called them, "a law *converting* the soul, and giving *light* to the eyes." This is perhaps the most accurate and comprehensive definition of the change for which we are contending, for it includes both the illumination of the understanding, and the alteration in the disposition.

If then this obnoxious expression signify nothing more nor less than that change of character which consists in turning from the world to God, however the *term* may offend, there is nothing ridiculous in the *thing*. Now, as it is not for the term which we contend, but for the principle conveyed by it ; so it is the principle and not the term, which is the real ground of objection ; though it is a little inconsistent that many who would sneer at the idea of conversion, would yet take it extremely ill if it were suspected that their hearts were not turned to God.

, *Reformation,*

Reformation, a term against which no objection is ever made, would, if words continued to retain their primitive signification, convey the same idea. For it is plain, that to *re-form* means to make anew. In the present use, however, it does not convey the meaning in the same extent, nor indeed does it imply the operation of the same principle. Many are reformed on human motives, many are partially reformed ; but only those who, as our great Poet says, are “ reformed altogether,” are converted. There is no complete reformation in the conduct effected without a revolution of the heart. Ceasing from some sins ; retaining others in a less degree ; or adopting such as are merely creditable ; or flying from one sin to another ; or ceasing from the external act without any internal change of disposition, is not Christian reformation. The new principle must abolish the old habit, the rooted inclination must be subdued by the substitution of an opposite one. The natural bias must be changed. The actual offence will no more be pardoned than cured if the inward corruption

ruption be not eradicated. To be “alive unto God through Jesus Christ” must follow “the death unto sin.” There cannot be new aims and ends where there is not a new principle to produce them. We shall not chuse a new path until a light from Heaven direct our choice and “guide our feet.” We shall not “run the way of God’s commandments” till God himself enlarge our heart.

We do not, however, insist that the change required is such as precludes the possibility of falling into sin ; but it is a change which fixes in the Soul such a disposition as shall ~~make~~ ^{via} sin a burden, as shall make the desire of pleasing God the governing desire of a ^{mag} heart ; as shall make him hate the evil ^{which} he does ; as shall make the low-^{est} of his attainments the subject of his deepest sorrow. A Christian has hopes and fears, cares and temptations, inclinations and desires, as well as other men. God in changing the heart does not extinguish the passions. Were that the case, the Christian life would cease to be a warfare.

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We are often deceived by that partial improvement which appears in the victory over some one bad quality. But we must not mistake the removal of a symptom for a radical cure of the disease. An occasional remedy might remove an accidental sickness, but it requires a general regimen to remove the diseased constitution.

It is the natural but melancholy history of the unchanged heart that, from youth to advanced years, there is no other change in the character but such as is incident to the number and quality of its vices; until the levity, vanity, and self-sufficing of the young man is carried into a reverent life, and only meet, and mix with, all becomes a mature period; that instead of crying out with the royal Prophet, " O remembrance not my old sins," he is inflaming his recollection by new ones. that age protracting all the fault of youth, furnishes its own contingent of vices; that sloth, suspicion, and covetousness, swell the account which Religion has not been called in to cancel: that

that in the world, to which he has lost the power to do right, he yet feels nothing of its power to inflict pain. That act of impudent roving in caudron bay in vindication of his own defects, that very conduct which makes him less tolerant of the defects of others, and more suspicious of their apparent virtue. His charity in a warmer season having, failed to bring him in that return of health for which it was partly, propagated, and Lewis, never allowed from the genuine spring, is dried up. His friendships having been formed on worldly principles or interest, or ambition, or convivial hilarity, fail him. "One must make some sacrifices to the world," is the prevailing language of the nominal Christian. "What will the world pay you for your sacrifices?" replies the real Christian. Though he finds that the world is insolvent, that it pays nothing of what it promised, for it cannot bestow what it does not possess—happiness; yet he continues to cling to it almost as confidently as if it had never disappointed

appointed him.—Were we called upon to name the object under the Sun which excites the deepest commiseration in the heart of Christian sensibility, which includes in itself the most affecting incongruities, which contains the sum and substance of real human misery, we should not hesitate to say AN IRRELIGIOUS OLD AGE. The mere debility of declining years, even the hopelessness of decrepitude, in the pious, though they excite sympathy, yet it is the sympathy of tenderness unmixed with distress. We take and give comfort from the cheering persuasion that the exhausted body will soon cease to clog its immortal companion; that the dim and failing eyes will soon open on a world of glory.—Dare we paint the reverse of the picture? Dare we suffer the imagination to dwell on the opening prospects of hoary impiety? Dare we figure to ourselves that the weaknesses, the miseries, the terrors we are now committing, . . . eas— are peace, are happiness, compared with the unutterable perspective?

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There is a fatal way of lulling the conscience by entertaining diminishing thoughts of sins long since committed. We persuade ourselves to forget them, and we therefore persuade ourselves that they are not remembered by God. But though distance diminishes objects to the eye of the beholder, it does not actually lessen them. Their real magnitude remains the same. Deliver us, merciful God, from the delusion of believing that secret sins, of which the world has no cognizance, early sins, which the world has forgotten, but which are known to "Him with whom we have to do," become by secrecy and distance as if they had never been. "Are not these things noted in thy book?" If we remember them, God may forget them, especially if our remembrance be such as to induce a sound repentance. If we remember them not, he assuredly will. The holy contrition which should accompany this remembrance, while it will not abate our humble trust in our compassionate Redeemer, will keep our conscience tender, and our heart watchful.

We

We do not deny that there is frequently much kindness and urbanity, much benevolence and generosity in men who do not even pretend to be religious. These qualities often flow from constitutional feeling, natural softness of temper, and warm affections; often from an elegant education, that best *human sweetner and polisher of social life.* We feel a tender regret as we exclaim, “what a fine soil would such dispositions afford to plant religion in!” Well bred persons are accustomed to respect all the decouins of society, to connect inseparably the ideas of personal comfort with public esteem, of generosity with credit, of order with respectability. They have a keen sense of dishonour, and are careful to avoid every thing that may bring the shadow of discredit on their name. Public opinion is the breath by which they live, the standard by which they act; of course they would not lower, by gr's misconduct, that standard on which their happiness depends. They have been taught to respect themselves; this they can do with more security while

while they can retain, on this half-way principle, the respect of others.

In some who make further advances towards religion, we continue to see it in that same low degree which we have always observed. It is dwarfish and stunted, it makes no shoots. Though it gives some signs of life it does not grow. By a tame and spiritless round, or rather by this fixed and immoveable position, we rob ourselves of that fair reward of peace and joy which attends on an humble consciousness of progress; on the feeling of difficulties conquered; on a sense of the divine favour. That religion which is profitable, is commonly perceptible. Nothing supports a traveller in his Christian course, like the conviction that he is getting on; like looking back on the country he has passed; and, above all, like the sense of that protection which has hitherto carried him on, and of that grace which has promised to support him to the end.

The proper motion of the renewed heart is still directed upward. True religion is
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of an aspiring nature, continually tending towards that Heaven from whence it was transplanted. Its top is high because its root is deep. It is watered by a perennial fountain; in its most flourishing state it is always capable of further growth. Real goodness proves itself to be such by a continual desire to be better. No virtue on earth is ever in a complete state. Whatever stage of religion any man has attained, if he be satisfied to rest in that stage, we would not call that man religious. The Gospel seems to consider the highest degree of goodness as the lowest with which a Christian ought to sit down satisfied. We cannot be said to be finished in any Christian grace, because there is not one which may not be carried further than we have carried it. This promotes the double purpose of keeping us humble as to our present stage, and of stimulating us to something higher which we may hope to attain.

That superficial thing, which by mere people of the world is dignified by the appellation

lation of religion, though it brings just that degree of credit which makes part of the system of worldly Christians, neither brings comfort for this world, nor security for the next. Outward observances, indispensable as they are, are not religion. They are the accessory, but not the principal ; they are important aids and adjuncts, but not the thing itself ; they are its aliment but not its life, the fuel but not the flame, the scaffolding but not the edifice. Religion can no more subsist merely by them, than it can subsist without them. They are divinely appointed, and must be conscientiously observed ; but observed as a means to promote an end, and not as an end in themselves.

The heartless homage of formal worship, where the vital power does not give life to the form, the cold compliment of ceremonial attendance, without the animating principle, as it will not bring peace to our own mind, so neither will it satisfy a jealous God. That God whose eye is on the heart, “ who trieth the reins and searcheth the

spirits," will not be satisfied that we make him little more than a nominal deity, while the world is the real object of our worship. Such persons seem to have almost the whole body of performance; all they want is the soul. They are constant in their devotions, but the heart, which even the heathens esteemed the best part of the sacrifice, they keep away. They read the Scriptures, but rest in the letter, instead of trying themselves by its spirit. They consider it as an enjoined task, but not as the quick and powerful instrument put into their hands for the critical dissection of " piercing and dividing asunder the soul and spirit;" not as the penetrating "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." These well-intentioned persons seem to spend no inconsiderable portion of time in religious exercises, and yet complain that they make little progress. They almost seem to insinuate, as if the Almighty did not keep his word with them, and manifest that religion to them is not "pleasantness," nor her "paths peace."

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Of such may we not ask, Would you not do better to examine than to complain? to enquire whether you do, indeed, possess a heart which, notwithstanding its imperfections, is sincerely devoted to God? He who does not desire to be perfect is not sincere. Would you not do well to convince yourselves that God is not unfaithful; that his promises do not fail, that his goodness is not slackened? May you not be entertaining some secret infidelity, practising some latent disobedience, withholding some part of your heart, neglecting to exercise that faith, subtracting something from that devotedness to which a Christian should engage himself, and to which the promises of God are annexed? Do you indulge no propensities contrary to his will? Do you never resist the dictates of his spirit, never shut your eyes to its illumination, nor your heart to its influences? Do you not indulge some cherished sin which obscures the light of grace, some practice which obstructs the growth of virtue, some distrust which chills

the warmth of love? The discovery will repay the search, and if you succeed in this scrutiny, let not the detection discourage but stimulate.

If, then, you resolve to take up religion in earnest, especially if you have actually adopted its customary forms, rest not in such low attainments as will afford neither present peace nor future happiness. To know Christianity only in its external forms, and its internal dissatisfactions, its superficial appearances without, and its disquieting apprehensions within, to be desirous of standing well with the world as a Christian, yet to be unsupported by a well-founded Christian hope, to depend for happiness on the opinion of men, instead of the favour of God, to go on dragging through the mere exercises of piety, without deriving from them real strength, or solid peace; to live in the dread of being called an enthusiast, by outwardly exceeding in religion, and in secret consciousness of falling short of it, to be conformed to the world's view of Christianity,
rather

rather than to aspire to be transformed by the renewing of your mind, is a state not of pleasure but of penalty, not of conquest but of hopeless conflict, not of ingenuous love but of tormenting fear. It is knowing religion only as the captive in a foreign land knows the country in which he is a prisoner. He hears from the cheerful natives of its beauties, but is himself ignorant of every thing beyond his own gloomy limits. He hears of others as free and happy, but feels nothing himself but the rigours of incarceration.

The Christian character is little understood by the votaries of the world; if it were, they would be struck with its grandeur. It is the very reverse of that meanness and pusillanimity, that abject spirit and those narrow views which those who know it not ascribe to it.

A Christian lives at the height of his being; not only at the top of his spiritual, but of his intellectual life. He alone lives in the full exercise of his rational powers.

Religion ennobles his reason while it enlarges it.

Let, then, your soul act up to its high destination ; let not that which was made to soar to heaven, grovel in the dust. Let it not live so much below itself. You wonder it is not more fixed, when it is perpetually resting on things which are not fixed themselves. In the rest of a Christian there is stability. Nothing can shake his confidence but sin. Outward attacks and troubles rather fix than un settle him, as tempests from without only serve to root the oak faster, while an inward canker will gradually rot and decay it.

That religion which sinks Christianity into a mere conformity to religious usages, must always fail of substantial effects. If sin be seated in the heart, if that be its home, that is the place in which it must be combated. It is in vain to attack it in the suburbs when it is lodged in the centre. Mere forms can never expel that enemy which they can never reach. By a religion of

of decencies, our corruptions may perhaps be driven out of sight, but they will never be driven out of possession. If they are expelled from their outworks, they will retreat to their citadel. If they do not appear in the grosser forms prohibited by the Decalogue, still they will exist. The shape may be altered, but the principle will remain. They will exist in the spiritual modification of the same sins equally forbidden by the divine Expositor. He who dares not be revengeful, will be unforgiving. He who ventures not to break the letter of the seventh commandment in act, will violate it in the spirit. He who has not courage to renounce Heaven by profligacy, will scale it by pride, or forfeit it by unprofitableness.

It is not any vain hope built on some external privilege or performance on the one hand, nor a presumptuous confidence that our names are written in the book of life, on the other, which can afford a reasonable ground of safety? but it is endeavouring to

keep all the commandments of God—it is living to him who died for us—it is being conformed to his image as well as redeemed by his blood. This is Christian virtue, this is the holiness of a believer. A lower motive will produce a lower morality, but such an unsanctified morality God will not accept.

For it will little avail us that Christ has died for us, that he has conquered sin, triumphed over the powers of darkness, and overcome the world, while any sin retains its unresisted dominion in our hearts, while the world is our idol, while our fostered corruptions cause us to prefer darkness to light. We must not persuade ourselves that we are reconciled to God while our rebellious hearts are not reconciled to goodness.

It is not casting a set of opinions into a mould, and a set of duties into a system, which constitutes the Christian religion. The circumference must have a centre, the body must have a soul, the performances must have a principle. Outward observances

ances were wisely constituted to rouse our forgetfulness, to awaken our secular spirits, to call back our negligent hearts ; but it was never intended that we should stop short in the use of them. They were designed to excite holy thoughts, to quicken us to holy deeds, but not to be used as equivalents for either. But we find it cheaper to serve God in a multitude of exterior acts, than to starve one interior corruption.

Nothing short of that uniform stable principle, that fixedness in religion which directs a man in all his actions, aims, and pursuits, to God as his ultimate end, can give consistency to his conduct, or tranquillity to his soul. This state once attained, he will not waste all his thoughts and designs upon the world ; he will not lavish all his affections on so poor a thing as his own advancement. He will desire to devote all to the only object worthy of them, to God. Our Saviour has taken care to provide that our ideas of glorifying

him, may not run out into fanciful chimeras or subtile inventions, by simply stating — “ HEREIN IS MY FATHER GLORIFIED THAT YE BEAR MUCH FRUIT.” This he goes on to inform us is the true evidence of our being of the number of his people, by adding — “ So shall ye be my disciples.”

CIIAP. IV.

Periodical Religion.

WE deceive ourselves not a little when we fancy that what is emphatically called *the world* is only to be found in this or that situation. The world is every where. It is a nature as well as a place ; a principle as well as “ a local habitation and a name.” Though the principle and the nature flourish most in those haunts which are their congenial soil, yet we are too ready, when we withdraw from the world abroad to bring it home, to lodge it in our own bosom. The natural heart is both its temple and its worshipper.

But the most devoted idolater of the world, with all the capacity and industry which he may have applied to the subject, has never yet been able to accomplish the grand design of uniting the interests of Heaven and earth. This experiment, which

has been more assiduously and more frequently tried than that of the Philosopher for the grand Hermetic secret, has been tried with about the same degree of success. The most laborious process of the spiritual chemist to reconcile religion with the world has never yet been competent to make the contending principles coalesce.

But to drop metaphor. Religion was never yet thoroughly relished by a heart full of the world. The world in return cannot be completely enjoyed where there is just religion enough to disturb its false peace. In such minds Heaven and earth ruin each other's enjoyments.

Life passes in the hopeless project of combining both. It is the object of the worldly system to flatter our passions, of the religious principle to subdue them, yet we adopt the one practically, while we maintain the other speculatively; we grasp at the gratifications of the one, we will not relinquish the promises of the other. What makes life so little productive of real happiness is that we are

are thus driving at opposite interests at the same time, though not with the same zeal.

It is no wonder that the more abstract doctrines of religion can make little impression on minds supremely engrossed by the objects of sense, when its most obvious and practical truths can but superficially impress them : when all the present objects which absorb their thoughts and affections are of a cast and character which furnish a perpetual hindrance and a powerful counteraction.

There is a religion which is too sincere for hypocrisy but too transient to be profitable ; too superficial to reach the heart, too unproductive to proceed from it. It is flight, but as far as it goes, not false. It has discernment enough to distinguish sin, but not firmness enough to oppose it ; compunction sufficient to soften the heart, but not vigour sufficient to reform it. It laments when it does wrong, and performs all the functions of repentance of sin except forsaking it. It has every thing of devotion except the stability, and gives every thing to religion, except the heart.

This is a religion of times, events, and circumstances ; it is brought into play by accidents, and dwindles away with the occasion which called it out. Festivals and Fasts, which occur but seldom, are much observed, and it is to be feared *because* they occur but seldom ; while the great festival which comes every week comes too often to be so respectfully treated. The piety of these people comes out much in sickness, but is apt to retreat again as recovery approaches. If they die they are placed by their admirers in the Saints' Calendar ; if they recover, they go back into the world they had renounced, and again suspend their amendment as often as Death suspends his blow.

There is another class whose views are still lower, who yet cannot so far shake off religion as to be easy without retaining its brief and stated forms, and who contrive to mix up these forms with a faith of a piece with their practice. They blend their inconsistent works with a vague and unwarranted reliance on what the Saviour has done for

for them, and thus patch up a merit and a propitiation of their own — running the hazard of incurring the danger of punishment by their lives, and inventing a scheme to avert it by their creed. Religion never interferes with their pleasures except by the compliment of a short and occasional suspension. Having got through these periodical acts of devotion, they return to the same scenes of vanity and idleness, which they had quitted for the temporary duty ; forgetting that it was the very end of those acts of devotion to cure the vanity and to correct the idleness. Had the periodical observance answered its true design, it would have disinclined them to the pleasure instead of giving them a dispensation for its indulgence. Had they used the devout exercise in a right spirit, and improved it to its true end, it would have set the heart and life at work on all those pursuits which it was calculated to promote. But their project has more ingenuity. By the slated minutes they give to religion, they cheaply purchase a protection for

for the misemployment of the rest of their time. They make these periodical devotions a kind of spiritual Insurance Office, which is to make up to the Adventurers in pleasure, any loss or damage which they may sustain in its voyage.

It is of these shallow devotions, these presumed equivalents for a new heart and a new life, that God declares by the Prophet, that he is “weary.” Though of his own express appointment, they become “an abomination” to him, as soon as the sign comes to be rested in for the thing signified. We Christians have “our New Moons and our sacrifices” under other names and other shapes; of which sacrifices, that is, of the spirit in which they are offered, the Almighty has said, “I cannot away with them, they are iniquity.”

Now is this superficial devotion that “giving up ourselves not with our lips only, but with our lives,” to our Maker, to which we solemnly pledge ourselves, at least once a week? Is consecrating an hour or

two to public worship on the Sunday morning, making the Sabbath "a delight?" Is defecrating the rest of the day by "doing our own ways, finding our own pleasure, speaking our own words," making it "honourable?"

Sometimes in an awakening sermon, these periodical religionists hear, with awe and terror, of the hour of death and the day of judgment. Their hearts are penetrated with the solemn sounds. They confess the awful realities by the impression they make on their own feelings. The Sermon ends, and with it the serious reflections it excited. While they listen to these things, especially if the preacher be alarming, they are all in all to them. They return to the world — and these things are as if they were not, as if they had never been ; as if their reality lasted only while they were preached ; as if their existence depended only on their being heard ; as if truth were no longer truth than while it solicited their notice ; as if there were as little stability in religion itself as in

their attention to it. As soon as their minds are disengaged from the question, one would think that death and judgment were an invention, that Heaven and hell were blotted from existence, that eternity ceased to be eternity, in the long intervals in which they ceased to be the object of *their* consideration.

This is the natural effect of what we venture to denominate *periodical religion*. It is a transient homage kept totally distinct and separate from the rest of our lives, instead of its being made the prelude and the principle of a course of pious practice; instead of our weaving our devotions and our actions into one uniform tissue by doing all in one spirit and to one end. When worshippers of this description pray for "a clean heart and a right Spirit," when they beg of God to "turn away their eyes from beholding vanity," is it not to be feared that they pray to be made what they resolve never to become, that they would be very unwilling to become as good as they pray to be made, and would

be sorry to be as penitent as they profess to desire? But alas! they are in little danger of being taken at their word; there is too much reason to fear their petitions will not be heard or answered; for prayer for the pardon of sin will obtain no pardon while we retain the sin in hope that the prayer will be accepted without the renunciation.

The most solemn office of our Religion, the sacred memorial of the death of its Author, the blessed injunction and tender testimony of his dying love, the consolation of the humble believer, the gracious appointment for strengthening his faith, quickening his repentance, awakening his gratitude, and kindling his charity, is too often resorted to on the same erroneous principle. He who ventures to live without the use of his holy institution, lives in a state of disobedience to the last appointment of his Redeemer. He who rests in it as a means for supplying the place of habitual piety, totally mistakes its design, and is fatally deceiving his own soul.

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This awful solemnity is, it is to be hoped, rarely frequented even by this class of Christians without a desire of approaching it with the pious feelings above described. But if they carry them to the Altar, are they equally anxious to carry them away from it, are they anxious to maintain them after it? Does the rite so seriously approached commonly leave any vestige of seriousness behind it? Are they careful to perpetuate the feelings they were so desirous to excite? Do they strive to make them produce solid and substantial effects? — Would that this inconstancy of mind were to be found only in the class of characters under consideration! Let the reader, however sincere in his desires, let the writer, however ready to lament the levity of others, seriously ask their own hearts if they can entirely acquit themselves of the inconsistency they are so forward to blame? If they do not find the charge brought against others b. too applicable to themselves?

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Irreverence antecedent to, or during this sacred solemnity, is far less rare than durable improvement after it. If there are, as we are willing to believe, none so profane as to violate the act, except those who impiously use it only as "a picklock to a place," there are too few who make it lastingly beneficial. Few so thoughtless as not to approach it with resolutions of amendment; few comparatively who carry these resolutions into effect. Fear operates in the previous instance. Why should not love operate in that which is subsequent?

A periodical religion is accompanied with a periodical repentance. This species of repentance is adopted with no small mental reservation. It is partial and disconnected. These fragments of contrition, these broken parcels of penitence—while a succession of worldly pursuits is not only resorted to, but is intended to be resorted to during the whole of the intervening spaces, are not that sorrow which the Almighty has promised to accept. To render them pleasing to God and efficacious,

efficacious to ourselves, there must be an agreement in the parts, an entireness in the whole web of life. There must be an integral repentance. A quarterly contrition in the four weeks preceding the sacred seasons will not wipe out the daily offences, the hourly negligences of the whole sinful year. Sins half forsaken through fear, and half retained through partially resisted temptation and partially adopted resolution, make up but an unprofitable piety.

In the bosom of these professors there is a perpetual conflict between fear and inclination. In conversation you will generally find them very warm in the cause of Religion; but it is Religion as opposed to Infidelity, not as opposed to worldly mindedness. They defend the worship of God, but desire to be excused from his service. Their heart is the slave of the world, but their blindness hides from them the turpitude of that world. They command piety, but dread its requisitions. They allow that repentance is necessary, but then how easy is it to find reasons

ious for deterring a necessary evil? Who will hastily adopt a painful measure which he can find a creditable pretence for evading? They censure whatever is ostensibly wrong, but avoiding only part of it, the part they retain robs them of the benefit of their partial renunciation.

We cannot sufficiently admire the wisdom of the church in enjoining extraordinary acts of devotion at the return of those festivals so happily calculated to excite devotional feelings. Extraordinary repentance of sin is peculiarly suitable to the seasons that record those grand events which sin occasioned. But the church never intended that these more stated and strict self-examinations should preclude our habitual self-inspection. It never intended its holy officers to supply the place of general holiness, but to promote it. It intended that these solemn occasions should animate the flame of piety, but it never meant to furnish a reason for neglecting to keep the flame alive till the next return should again kindle the dying embers. It
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meant that every such season should gladden the heart of the Christian at its approach, and not discharge him from duty at its departure. It meant to lighten his conscience of the burden of sin, not to encourage him to begin a new score, again to be wiped off at the succeeding festival. It intended to quicken the vigilance of the believer, and not to dismiss the sentinel from his post. If we are not the better for these divinely appointed helps, we are the worse. If we use them as a discharge from that diligence which they were intended to promote, we convert our blessings into snares, our devotions into sins.

This abuse of our advantages arises from our not incorporating our devotions into the general habit of our lives. Till our religion become an inward principle and not an external act, we shall not receive that benefit from her forms, however excellent, which they are calculated to convey. It is to those who possess the spirit of Christianity that her forms are so valuable. To them
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the form excites the spirit, as the spirit animates the form. Till religion becomes the desire of our hearts, it will not become the business of our lives. We are far from meaning that it is to be its actual occupation; but that every portion of time, every habit of the mind, every act of life, is to be animated by its spirit, influenced by its principle, governed by its power.

The very make of our nature and our necessary commerce with the world, naturally fill our hearts and minds with thoughts and ideas, over which we have unhappily too little controul. We find this to be the case when in our better hours we attempt to give ourselves up to serious reflection. How many intrusions of worldly thoughts, how many impertinent imaginations, not only irrelevant but uncalled and unwelcome, crowd in upon the mind so forcibly as scarcely to be repelled by our sincerest efforts. How important then to repel such images must that mind be, which is devoted to worldly pursuits, which yields itself up to them, whose opinions, habits,
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and conduct are under their allowed influence !

We should fairly adjust the claims of both worlds, and having equitably determined their value, act upon that determination. We shall then fix the proportions and the limits of that attention which each deserves. A just estimate of their respective worth would cool our ardor and tame our immoderate desires after things so really little in themselves, and so short in their duration. Providence has set narrow bounds to life, piety should proportionally narrow our anxieties respecting it; for to be inordinately enamoured of any object, the worth of which will not justify the attachment, is, *as an ill-regulated mind and a defective judgment.*

All the strong remarks of devout writers on the littleness of those things which the world call great, might be looked upon as mere rhetorical flourishes, or as the envious censures of retired men who could not attain the things they contemn, did not their brief duration justify the description.—Let the censor only image to himself the world

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passing away, and the earth vanishing, ere long to all, and to every man at his death, which to him is the end of the world, and he whom he now despises as a passionate claimer will then appear a sober reasoner.

Let us not then consider a spirit of worldliness as a little infirmity, as a natural and therefore a pardonable weakness; as a trifling error which will be overlooked for the sake of our many good qualities. It is in fact the essence of our other faults: the temper that stands between us and our salvation: the spirit which is in direct opposition to the spirit of God. Individual sins may more easily be cured, but this is the principle of all spiritual disease. A worldly spirit, where it is rooted and cherished, runs through the whole character, insinuates itself in all we say and think and do. It is this which makes us so dead in religion, so averse from spiritual things, so forgetful of God, so unmindful of eternity, so satisfied with ourselves, so impatient of serious discourse, and so alive to that vain and frivolous intercourse which

excludes intellect almost as much as piety from our general conversation.

It is not therefore our more considerable actions alone which require watching, for they seldom occur. They do not form the habit of life in ourselves, nor the chief importance of our example to others. It is to our ordinary behaviour, it is to our deportment in common life; it is to our prevailing turn of mind in general intercourse, by which we shall profit or corrupt those with whom we associate. It is our conduct in social life which will help to diffuse a spirit of piety or a distaste to it. If we have much influence, this is the place in which particularly to exert it. If we have little, we have still enough to infect the temper and lower the tone of our narrow society.

If we really believe that it is the design of Christianity to raise us to a participation of the divine nature, the slightest reflection on this elevation of our character would lead us to maintain its dignity in the ordinary intercourse of life. We should not so much enquire

enquire whether we are transgressing any actual prehibition, whether any standing law is pointed against us, as whether we are supporting the dignity of the Christian character; whether we are acting suitably to our profession; whether more exactness in the common occurrences of the day, more correctness in our conversation, would not be such evidences of our religion, as by being obvious and intelligible, might not almost irresistibly produce important effects.

The most insignificant people must not through indifference and selfishness undervalue their own influence. Most persons have a little circle of which they are a sort of centre. Its smallness may lessen their quantity of good, but does not diminish the duty of using that little influence well. Where is the human being so incalculable but that he can in some shape benefit others, either by calling their virtues into exercise, or by setting them an example of virtue himself? But we are humble just in the wrong place. When the exhibition of our talents or splen-

did qualities is in question we are not backward in the display. When a little self-denial is to be exercised, when a little good might be effected by our example, by our discreet management in company, by giving a better turn to conversation, then at once we grow wickedly modest—"Such an insignificant creature as I am can do no good."—"Had I a higher rank or brighter talents, then indeed my influence might be exerted to some purpose."—Thus under the mask of disidence, we justify our indolence; and let slip those lesser occasions of promoting religion which if we all improved, how much might the condition of society be raised!

The hackneyed interrogation, "What—must we be always talking about religion?" must have the hackneyed answer—Far from it. Talking about religion is not being religious. But we may bring the *spirit* of religion into company and keep it in perpetual operation when we do not professedly make it our subject. We may be constantly advancing

advancing its interests, we may without effort or affectation be giving an example of candour, of moderation, of humility, of forbearance. We may employ our influence by correcting falsehood, by checking levity, by discrediting calumny, by vindicating misrepresented merit, by countenancing every thing which has a good tendency—in short, by throwing our whole weight, be it great or small, into the right scale.

CHAP. V.

Prayer.

PRAYER is the application of want to him who only can relieve it ; the voice of sin to him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty, the prostration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of trust. It is not eloquence, but earnestness, not the definition of helplessness, but the feeling of it ; not figures of speech, but compunction of soul. It is the “ Lord save us, we perish,” of drowning Peter ; the cry of faith to the ear of mercy.

Adoration is the noblest employment of created beings ; confession the natural language of guilty creatures ; gratitude the spontaneous expression of pardoned sinners. Prayer is desire. It is not a mere conception of the mind, nor a mere effort of the intellect, nor an act of the memory ; but

but an elevation of the soul towards its Maker ; a pressing sense of our own ignorance and infirmity, a consciousness of the perfections of God, of his readiness to hear, of his power to help, of his willingness to save. It is not an emotion produced in the senses, nor an effect wrought by the imagination ; but a determination of the will, an effusion of the heart.

Prayer is the guide to self-knowledge by prompting us to look after our sins in order to pray against them ; a motive to vigilance, by teaching us to guard against those sins which, through self-examination, we have been enabled to detect.

Prayer is an act both of the understanding and of the heart. The understanding must apply itself to the knowledge of the divine perfections, or the heart will not be led to the adoration of them. It would not be a *reasonable* service, if the mind was excluded. It must be rational worship, or the human worshipper would not bring to the service the distinguishing faculty of his nature,

which is reason. It must be spiritual worship or it would want the distinctive quality to make it acceptable to Him who is a spirit, and who has declared that he will be worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

Prayer is right in itself as the most powerful means of resisting sin and advancing in holiness. It is above all right, as every thing is, which has the authority of Scripture, the command of God, and the example of Christ.

There is a perfect consistency in all the ordinations of God; a perfect congruity in the whole scheme of his dispensations. If man were not a corrupt creature, such prayer as the Gospel enjoins would not have been necessary. Had not Prayer been an important means for curing those corruptions, a God of perfect wisdom would not have ordered it. He would not have prohibited every thing which tends to inflame and promote them, had they not existed, nor would he have commanded every thing that has a tendency to diminish and remove them,

them, had not their existence been fatal. Prayer therefore is an indispensable part of his economy and of our obedience.

It is a hackneyed objection to the use of Prayer, that it is offending the omniscience of God to suppose he requires information of our wants. But no objection can be more futile. We do not pray to inform God of our wants, but to express our sense of the wants which he already knows. As he has not so much made his promises to our necessities, as to our requests, it is reasonable that our requests should be made before we can hope that our necessities will be relieved. God does not promise to those who want that they shall "have," but to those who "ask;" nor to those who need that they shall "find," but to those who "seek." So far therefore from his previous knowledge of our wants being a ground of objection to Prayer, it is in fact the true ground for our application. Were he not Knowledge itself, our information would be of as little use, as our appli-

cation would be, were he not Goodness itself.

We cannot attain to a just notion of Prayer while we remain ignorant of our own nature, of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture, of our relation to him and dependence on him. If therefore we do not live in the daily study of the Holy Scriptures, we shall want the highest motives to this duty, and the best helps for performing it ; if we do, the cogency of these motives, and the inestimable value of these helps, will render argument unnecessary and exhortation superfluous.

One cause therefore of the dullness of many Christians in prayer is their slight acquaintance with the Sacred volume. They hear it periodically, they read it occasionally, they are contented to know it historically, consider it superficially ; but they do not endeavour to get their minds imbued with its spirit. If they store their memory with its facts, they do not impress their hearts with its truths. They do not regard it as

the nutriment on which their spiritual life and growth depend. They do not pray over it ; they do not consider all its doctrines as of practical application ; they do not cultivate that spiritual discernment which alone can enable them judiciously to appropriate its promises and its denunciations to their own actual case. They do not apply it as an unerring line to ascertain their own rectitude or obliquity.

In our retirements, we too often fritter away our precious moments, moments rescued from the world, in trivial, sometimes, it is to be feared, in corrupt thoughts. But if we must give the reins to our imagination, let us send this excursive faculty to range among great and noble objects. Let it stretch forward under the sanction of faith and the anticipation of prophecy, to the accomplishment of those glorious promises and tremendous threatenings which will soon be realized in the eternal world. These are topics which under the safe and sober

guidance of Scripture, will fix its largest speculations and sustain its loftiest flights. The same Scripture, while it expands and elevates the mind, will keep it subject to the dominion of truth ; while at the same time it will teach it that its boldest excursions must fall infinitely short of the astonishing realities of a future state.

Though we cannot pray with a too deep sense of sin, we may make our sins too exclusively the object of our prayers. While we keep, with a self-abasing eye, our own corruptions in view, let us look with equal intentness on that mercy, which cleanseth from all sin. Let our prayers be all humiliation, but let them not be all complaint. When men indulge no other thought but that they are rebels, the hopelessness of pardon hardens them into disloyalty. Let them look to the mercy of the King, as well as to the rebellion of the Subject. If we contemplate his grace as displayed in the Gospel, then, though our humility will increase, our despair

despair will vanish. Gratitude in this, as in human instances, will create affection. "We love him because he first loved us."

Let us therefore always keep our unworthiness in view as a reason why we stand in need of the mercy of God in Christ ; but never plead it as a reason why we should not draw nigh to him to implore that mercy. The best men are unworthy for their own sakes ; the worst on ^{the} repentance will be accepted for his sake and through his merits..

In prayer, then, the perfections of God, and especially his mercies in our redemption, should occupy our thoughts as much as our sins ; our obligation to him as much as our departures from him. We should keep up in our hearts a constant sense of our own weakness, not with a design to discourage the mind and depress the spirits ; but with a view to drive us out of ourselves, in search of the divine assistance. We should contemplate our infirmity in order to draw us to look for his strength, and to seek that power from God which we vainly look for in ourselves :

selves: We do not tell a sick friend of his danger in order to grieve or terrify him, but to induce him to apply to his Physician, and to have recourse to his remedy.

Among the charges which have been brought against serious piety, one is that it teaches men to despair. The charge is just in one sense as to the fact, but false in the sense intended. It teaches us to despair indeed of ourselves, while it inculcates that faith in a Redeemer, which is the true antidote to despair. Faith quickens the doubting spirit while it humbles the presumptuous. The lowly Christian takes comfort in the blessed promise, that God will never forsake them that are his. The presumptuous man is equally right in the doctrine, but wrong in applying it. He takes that comfort to himself which was meant for another class of characters. The mal-appropriation of Scripture promises, and threatenings, is the cause of much error and delusion.

Some devout enthusiasts have fallen into error by an unnatural and impracticable disin-

disinterestedness, asserting that God is to be loved exclusively for himself, with an absolute renunciation of any view of advantage to ourselves ; yet that prayer cannot be mercenary, which involves God's glory with our own happiness, and makes his will the law of our requests. Though we are to desire the glory of God supremely ; though this ought to be our grand actuating principle, yet he has graciously permitted, commanded, invited us, to attach our own happiness to this primary object. The Bible exhibits not only a beautiful, but an inseparable combination of both, which delivers us from the danger of unnaturally renouncing our own benefit, for the promotion of God's glory on the one hand; and on the other, from seeking any happiness independent of him, and underived from him. In enjoining us to love him supremely, he has connected an unspeakable blessing with a paramount duty, the highest privilege with the most positive command.

What a triumph for the humble Christian to be assured, that “the high and lofty one
which

which inhabiteth eternity," condescends at the same time to dwell in the heart of the contrite; in *his* heart! To know that God is the God of his life, to *know* that he is even invited to take the Lord for his God. — To close with God's offers, to accept his invitations, to receive God as his portion, must surely be more pleasing to our heavenly Father, than separating our happiness from his glory. To disconnect our interests from his goodness, is at once to detract from his perfections, and to obscure the brightness of our own hopes. The declarations of inspired Writers are confirmed by the authority of the heavenly hosts. They proclaim that the glory of God and the happiness of his creatures, so far from interfering, are connected with each other. We know but of one Anthem composed and sung by Angels, and this most harmoniously combines "the glory of God in th' highest with peace on earth and good will to men."

"The beauty of Scripture," says the great Saxon Reformer, "consists in pronouns." This God is *our* God — God even our
own

own God shall bless us — How delightful the appropriation ! to glorify him as being in himself consummate excellence, and to love him from the feeling that his excellence is directed to our felicity ! Here modesty would be ingratitude, disinterestedness, rebellion. It would be severing ourselves from him, in whom we live, and move, and are ; it would be dissolving the connection which he has condescended to establish between himself and his Creatures.

It has been justly observed, that the Scripture Saints make this union the chief ground of their grateful exultation — “*My strength,*” “*my rock,*” “*my fortress,*” “*my deliverer!*” again “*let the God of my salvation be exalted!*” Now take away the pronoun and substitute the article *the*, how comparatively cold is the impression ! The consummation of the joy arises from the peculiarity, the intimacy, the endearment of the relation.

Nor to the liberal Christian is the grateful joy diminished, when he blesses his God as
“*the*

“ the God of all them that trust in him.” All general blessings, will he say; all providential mercies, are mine individually, are mine as completely, as if no other shared in the enjoyment. Life, light, the earth and heavens, the Sun and Stars, whatever sustains the body, and recreates the spirits ! My obligation is as great as if the mercy had been made purely for me ; as great ? nay it is greater — it is augmented by a sense of the millions who participate in the blessing. The same enlargement of personal obligation holds good, nay rises higher in the mercies of Redemption. The Lord is *my* Saviour as completely as if he had redeemed only me. That he has redeemed “ a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” is diffusion without abatement ; it is general participation without individual diminution. Each has all.

In adoring the Providence of God, we are apt to be struck with what is new and out of course, while we too much overlook long,

long, habitual, and uninterrupted mercies. But common mercies, if less striking, are more valuable, both because we have them always, and for the reason above assigned, because others share them. The ordinary blessings of life are overlooked for the very reason that they ought to be most prized, because they are most uniformly bestowed. They are most essential to our support, and when once they are withdrawn we begin to find that they are also most essential to our comfort. Nothing raises the price of a blessing like its removal, whereas it was its continuance which should have taught us its value. We require novelties, to awaken our gratitude, not considering that it is the duration of mercies which enhances their value. We want fresh excitements. We consider mercies long enjoyed as things of course, as things to which we have a sort of presumptive claim ; as if God had no right to withdraw what he has once bestowed, as if he were obliged to continue what he has once been pleased to confer.

But

But that the Sun has shone unremittingly from the day that God created him, is not a less stupendous exertion of power than that the hand which fixed him in the heavens and marked out his progress through them, once said by his servant, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon." That he has gone on in his strength, driving his uninterrupted career, and "rejoicing as a Giant to run his course," for six thousand years, is a more astonishing exhibition of Omnipotence than that he should have been once suspended by the hand which set him in motion. That the ordinances of heaven, that the established laws of nature, should have been for one day interrupted to serve a particular occasion, is a less real wonder, and certainly a less substantial blessing, than that in such a multitude of ages they should have pursued their appointed course, for the comfort of the whole system.

As the affections of the Christian ought to be set on things above, so it is for them that his prayers will be chiefly addressed. God,

in promising to “ give those who delight in him the desire of their heart,” could never mean temporal things, for these they might desire improperly as to the object, and inordinately as to the degree. The promise relates principally to spiritual blessings. He not only gives us these mercies, but the very desire to obtain them is also his gift. Here our prayer requires no qualifying, no conditioning, no limitation. We cannot err in our choice, for God himself is the object of it : we cannot exceed in the degree, unless it were possible to love him too well, or to please him too much.

We should pray for worldly comforts, and for a blessing on our earthly plans, though lawful in themselves, conditionally, and with a reservation, because, after having been earnest in our requests for them, it may happen that when we come to the petition “ thy will be done” we may in these very words be inadvertently praying that our previous petitions may not be granted. In this brief request consists the vital principle, the essential spirit of

of Prayer. God shews his munificence in encouraging us to ask most earnestly for the greatest things, by promising that the smaller “ shall be added unto us.” We therefore acknowledge his liberality, most when we request the highest favours. He manifests his infinite superiority to earthly fathers by chiefly delighting to confer those spiritual gifts which *they* less solicitously desire for their children than those worldly advantages on which God sets so little value.

Nothing short of a sincere devotedness to God can enable us to maintain an equality of mind, under unequal circumstances. We murmur that we have not the things we ask amiss, not knowing that they are withheld by the same mercy by which the things that are good for us are granted. Things good in themselves may not be good for us. A resigned spirit is the proper disposition to prepare us for receiving mercies, or for having them denied. Resignation of soul, like the allegiance of a good subject, is always in readiness though not in action ;
whereas

whereas an impatient mind is a spirit of disaffection, always prepared to revolt, when the will of the sovereign is in opposition to that of the subject. This seditious principle is the infallible characteristic of an unrenewed mind.

A sincere love of God will make us thankful when our supplications are granted, and patient and cheerful when they are denied. He who feels his heart rise against any divine dispensation ought not to rest till by serious meditation and earnest prayer it be moulded into submission. An habit of acquiescence in the will of God, will so operate on the faculties of his mind, that even his judgment will embrace the conviction, that what he once so ardently desired, would not have been ~~that~~ good thing, which his blindness had conspired with his wishes to make him believe it to be. He will recollect the many instances in which if his importunity had prevailed, the thing which ignorance requested, and wisdom denied, would have insured his misery. Every fresh disappoint-

disappointment will teach him to distrust himself and to confide in God. Experience will instruct him that there may be a better way of hearing our requests than that of granting them. Happy for us that He to whom they are addressed knows which is best and acts upon that knowledge.

We should endeavour to render our private devotions effectual remedies for our own particular sins. Prayer against sin in general is too indefinite to reach the individual case. We must bring it home to our own heart, else we may be confessing another man's sins and overlooking our own. If we have any predominant fault, we should pray more especially against that fault. If we pray for any virtue of which we particularly stand in need, we should dwell on our own deficiencies in that virtue, till our souls become deeply affected with our want of it. Our Prayers should be circumstantial, not as was before observed for the information of infinite wisdom, but for the stirring up of our own dull affections. And as the recapitulation of

our wants tends to keep up a sense of our dependence, the enlarging on our especial mercies will tend to keep alive a sense of gratitude. While indiscriminate petitions, confessions, and thanksgivings, leave the mind to wander in indefinite devotion, and unaffected generalities, without personality and without appropriation. It may be obvious that we except those grand universal points in which all have an equal interest, and which must always form the essence of family, and especially of public prayer.

On the blessing attending importunity in prayer, the Gospel is abundantly explicit. God perhaps delays to give that we may persevere in asking. He may require importunity for our own sakes, that the frequency and urgency of the petition, may bring our hearts into that frame to which he will be favourable.

As we ought to live in a spirit of obedience to his commands, so we should live in a frame of waiting for his blessing on our prayers, and in a spirit of gratitude when

we have obtained it. This is that “preparation of the heart” which would always keep us in a posture for duty. If we desert the duty because an immediate blessing does not visibly attend it, it shews that we do not serve God out of conscience but selfishness ; that we grudge expending on him that service which brings us in no immediate interest. Though he grant not our petition, let us never be tempted to withdraw our application.

Our reluctant devotions may remind us of the remark of a certain great political wit, who apologized for his late attendance in Parliament, by his being detained while a party of soldiers were *dragging a volunteer* to his duty. How many excuses do we find for not being in time ! How many apologies for brevity ! How many evasions for neglect ! How unwilling, too often, are we to come into the divine presence, how reluctant to remain in it ! Those hours which are least valuable for business, which are least seasonable for pleasure, we commonly give to religion.

ligion. Our energies, which were so readily exerted in the society we have just quitted, are sunk as we approach the divine presence. Our hearts, which were all alacrity in some frivolous conversation, become cold and inanimate, as if it were the natural property of devotion to freeze the affections. Our animal spirits which so readily performed their functions before, now slacken their vigour and lose their vivacity. The sluggish body sympathizes with the unwilling mind, and each promotes the deadness of the other ; both are slow in listening to the call of duty ; both are soon weary in performing it. How do our fancies rove back to the pleasures we have been enjoying ! How apt are the diversified images of those pleasures to mix themselves with our better thoughts, to pull down our higher aspirations. As prayer requires all the energies of the compound being of man, so we too often feel as if there were a conspiracy of body, soul, and spirit, to disincite and disqualify us for it.

When the heart is once sincerely turned to
c 2 religion,

religion, we need not, every time we pray, examine into every truth, and seek for conviction over and over again; but assume that those doctrines are true, the truth of which we have already proved. From a general and fixed impression of these principles, will result a taste, a disposedness, a love, so intimate, that the convictions of the understanding will become the affections of the heart.

To be deeply impressed with a few fundamental truths, to digest them thoroughly, to meditate on them seriously, to pray over them fervently, to get them deeply rooted in the heart, will be more productive of faith and holiness, than to labour after variety, ingenuity, or elegance. The indulgence of imagination will rather distract than edify. Searching after ingenious thoughts will rather divert the attention from God to ourselves, than promote fixedness of thought, singleness of intention, and devotedness of spirit. Whatever is subtil and refined, is in danger of being unscriptural. If we do not

not guard the mind it will learn to wander in quest of novelties. It will learn to set more value on original thoughts than devout affections. It is the business of prayer to cast down imaginations which gratify the natural activity of the mind, while they leave the heart unhumbed.

We should confine ourselves to the present business of the present moment ; we should keep the mind in a state of perpetual dependence ; we should entertain no long views. "Now is the accepted time." "To-day we must hear his voice." "Give us *this* day our daily bread." The manna will not keep till to-morrow : to-morrow will have its own wants, and must have its own petitions. To-morrow we must seek the bread of heaven afresh.

We should however avoid coming to our devotions with unfurnished minds. We should be always laying in materials for prayer, by a diligent course of serious reading, by treasuring up in our minds the most important truths. If we rush into the divine

presence with a vacant or ignorant and unprepared mind, with a heart full of the world; as we shall feel no disposition or qualification for the work we are about to engage in, so we cannot expect that our petitions will be heard or granted. There must be some congruity between the heart and the object, some affinity, between the state of our minds and the business in which they are employed, if we would expect success in the work.

We are often deceived both as to the principle and the effect of our prayers. When from some external cause the heart is glad, the spirits light, the thoughts ready, the tongue voluble, a kind of spontaneous eloquence is the result; with this we are pleased, and this ready flow we are willing to impose on ourselves for piety.

On the other hand, when the mind is dejected, the animal spirits low, the thoughts confused; when apposite words do not readily present themselves, we are apt to accuse our hearts of want of fervour, to lament our

our weakness, and to mourn that because we have had no pleasure in praying, our prayers have, therefore, not ascended to the throne of mercy. In both cases we perhaps judge ourselves unfairly. These unready accents, these faltering praises, these ill-expressed petitions, may find more acceptance than the florid talk with which we were so well satisfied : the latter consisted, it may be, of shining thoughts, floating on the fancy, eloquent words dwelling only on the lips ; the former was the sighing of a contrite heart, abased by the feeling of its own unworthiness, and awed by the perfections of a holy and heart-searching God. The heart is dissatisfied with its own dull and tasteless repetitions, which, with all their imperfections, Infinite Goodness may perhaps hear with favor *. — We may not only be elated

with

* Of these sort of repetitions, our admirable Church Liturgy has been accused as a fault ; but this defect, if it be one, happily accommodates itself to our infirmities. Where is the favoured being whose attention never wanders, whose heart accompanies his lips in every

with the fluency but even with the fervency of our prayers. Vanity may grow out of the very act of renouncing it, and we may begin to feel proud at having humbled ourselves so eloquently.

There is however a strain and spirit of prayer equally distinct from that facility and copiousness for which we certainly are never the better in the sight of God, and from that constraint and dryness for which we may be never the worse. There is a simple, solid, pious strain of prayer in which the suppliant is so filled and occupied with a sense of his own dependence, and of the importance of the things for which he asks, and so persuaded of the power and grace of God through Christ to give him those things, that while he is engaged in it, he does not merely imagine, but feels assured that God

every sentence? 1. there no absence of mind in the petitioner, no wandering of the thoughts, no inconstancy of the heart, which these repetitions are wisely calculated to correct, to rouse the dead attention, to bring back the strayed affections?

is nigh to him as a reconciled father, so that every burden and doubt are taken off from his mind. "He knows," as St. John expresses it, "that he has the petitions he desired of God," and feels the truth of that promise, "while they are yet speaking I will hear." This is the perfection of prayer.

CHAP. VI.

Cultivation of a Devotional Spirit.

TO maintain a devotional Spirit, two things are especially necessary—habitually to cultivate the disposition, and habitually to avoid whatever is unfavourable to it. Frequent retirement and recollection are indispensable, together with such a general course of reading, as, if it do not actually promote the spirit we are endeavouring to maintain, shall never be hostile to it. We should avoid as much as in us lies all such society, all such amusements as excite tempers which it is the daily business of a Christian to subdue, and all those feelings which it is his constant duty to suppress.

And here may we venture to observe, that it some things which are apparently innocent, and do not assume an alarming aspect, or bear a dangerous character; things which the generality

nerality of decorous people affirm, (how truly we know not,) to be safe for them ; yet if we find that these things stir up in us improper propensities, if they awaken thoughts which ought not to be excited ; if they abate our love for religious exercises, or infringe on our time for performing them ; if they make spiritual concerns appear insipid, if they wind our hearts a little more about the world ; in short, if we have formerly found them injurious to our own souls, then let no example or persuasion, no belief of their alleged innocence, no plea of their perfect safety, tempt us to indulge in them. It matters little to *our* security what they are to others. Our business is with ourselves. Our responsibility is on our own heads. Others cannot know the side on which we are assailable. Let our own unbiassed judgment determine our opinion, let our own experience decide for our own conduct.

In speaking of books, we cannot forbear noticing that very prevalent sort of reading, which is little less productive of evil, little

less prejudicial to moral and mental improvement, than that which carries a more formidable appearance. We cannot confine our censure to those more corrupt writings which deprave the heart, débauch the imagination, and poison the principles. Of these the turpitude is so obvious that no caution on this head, it is presumed, *can* be necessary. But if justice forbids us to confound the insipid with the mischievous, the idle with the vicious, and the frivolous with the profligate, still we can only admit of shades, deep shades we allow, of difference. These works, if comparatively harmless, yet debase the taste, slacken the intellectual nerve, let down the understanding, set the fancy loose, and send it gadding among low and mean objects. They not only run away with the time which should be given to better things, but gradually destroy all taste for better things. They sink the mind to their own standard, and give it a sluggish reluctance, we had almost said, a moral incapacity for every thing above their level. The mind, by long habit

habit of stooping, loses its erectness, and yields to its degradation. It becomes so low and narrow by the littleness of the things which engage it, that it requires a painful effort to lift itself high enough, or to open itself wide enough, to embrace great and noble objects. The appetite is vitiated. Excess, instead of producing a surfeit, by weakening the digestion, only induces a loathing for stronger nourishment. The faculties which might have been expanding in works of science, or soaring in the contemplation of genius, become satisfied with the impertinences of the most ordinary fiction, lose their relish for the severity of truth, the elegance of taste, and the soberness of religion. Lulled in the torpor of repose, the intellect dozes, and enjoys in its waking dream

All the wild trash of sleep, without the rest.

In avoiding books which excite the passions, it would seem strange to include even some devotional works. Yet such as merely kindle warm feelings are not always the safest. Let us rather prefer those which, while they tend

tend to raise a devotional spirit, awaken the affections without disordering them, which while they elevate the desires, purify them ; which shew us our own nature, and lay open its corruptions. Such as shew us the malignity of sin, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the feebleness of our best resolutions ; such as teach us to pull off the mask from the fairest appearances, and discover every hiding-place, where some lurking evil would conceal itself ; such as shew us not what we appear to others, but what we really are ; such as, co-operating with our interior feelings, and shewing us our natural state, point out our absolute need of a Redeemer, lead us to seek to him for pardon from a conviction that there is no other refuge, no other salvation. Let us be conversant with such writings as teach us that while we long to obtain the remission of our transgressions, we must not desire the remission of our duties. Let us seek for such a Saviour as will not only deliver us from the punishment of sin, but from its dominion also.

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The constant habit of perusing devout books is so indispensable, that it has been termed with great propriety the oil of the lamp of prayer. Too much reading, however, and too little meditation, may produce the effect of a lamp inverted, which is extinguished by the very excess of that aliment whose property it is to feed it.

And let us ever bear in mind that the end of prayer is not answered when the Prayer is finished. We should regard prayer as a means to a farther end. The *act* of prayer is not sufficient, we must cultivate a *spirit* of prayer. And though, when the actual devotion is over, we cannot, amid the distractions of company and business, always be thinking of heavenly things, yet the desire, the frame, the propensity, the willingness to return to them, we must, however difficult, endeavour to maintain.

The proper temper for prayer should precede the act. The disposition should be wrought in the mind before the exercise is begun. To bring a proud temper to an humble

humble prayer, a luxurious habit to a self-denying prayer, or a worldly disposition to a spiritually minded prayer, is a positive anomaly. A habit is more powerful than an act, and a previously indulged temper during the day will not, it is to be feared, be fully counteracted by the exercise of a few minutes devotion at night.

Prayer is designed for a perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue ; if therefore the cause is not followed by its consequence, a consequence inevitable but for the impediments we bring to it, we rob our nature of its highest privilege, and run the danger of incurring a penalty where we are looking for a blessing.

That the habitual tendency of the life should be the preparation for the stated prayer, is naturally suggested to us by our blessed Redeemer in his Sermon on the Mount. He announced the precepts of holiness, and their corresponding beatitudes ; he gave the spiritual exposition of the Law, the directions for alms-giving, the exhort-

ation to love our enemies, nay, the essence and spirit of the whole Decalogue, previous to his delivering his own divine prayer, as a pattern for ours. Let us learn from this that the preparation of prayer is therefore to live in all those pursuits which we may safely beg of God to bless, and in a conflict with all those temptations into which we pray not to be led.

If God be the centre to which our hearts are tending, every line in our lives must meet in him. With this point in view there will be a harmony between our prayers and our practice, a consistency between devotion and conduct, which will make every part turn to this one end, "bear upon this one point. For the beauty of the Christian scheme consists not in parts, (however good in themselves) which tend to separate views, and lead to different ends; but it arises from its being one entire, uniform, connected plan, " compacted of that which every joint supplieth," and of which all the parts terminate in this one grand ultimate point.

The

The design of Prayer therefore, as we before observed, is not merely to make us devout while we are engaged in it, but that its odour may be diffused through all the intermediate spaces of the day, enter into all its occupations, duties, and tempers. Nor must its results be partial, or limited to easy and pleasant duties, but extend to such as are less alluring. When we pray, for instance, for our enemies, the prayer must be rendered practical, must be made a means of softening our spirit, and cooling our resentment toward them. If we deserve their enmity, the true spirit of prayer will put us upon endeavouring to cure the fault which has excited it. If we do not deserve it, it will put us on striving for a placable temper, and we shall endeavour not to let slip so favourable an occasion of cultivating it. There is no such softener of avarimosity, no such soother of resentment, no such allayer of hatred, as sincere cordial prayer.

It is obvious, that the precept to pray without ceasing can never mean to enjoin a con-

a continual course of actual prayer. But while it more directly enjoins us to embrace all proper occasions of performing this sacred duty, or rather of claiming this valuable privilege, so it plainly implies that we should try to keep up constantly that sense of the divine presence which shall maintain the disposition. In order to this, we should inure our minds to reflection ; we should encourage serious thoughts. A good thought barely passing through the mind will make little impression on it. We must arrest it, constrain it to remain with us, expand, amplify, and, as it were, take it to pieces. It must be distinctly unfolded, and carefully examined, or it will leave "no precise idea, it must be fixed and incorporated, or it will produce no practical effect. We must not dismiss it till it has left some trace on the mind, till it has made some impression on the heart.

On the other hand, if we give the reins to a loose ungoverned fancy, at other times, if we abandon our minds to frivolous thoughts ; if

if we fill them with corrupt images; if we cherish sensual ideas during the rest of the day, can we expect that none of these images will intrude, that none of these impressions will be revived, but that “the temple into which foul things” have been invited will be cleansed at a given moment; that worldly thoughts will recede and give place, at once, to pure and holy thoughts? Will that spirit, grieved by impurity, or resisted by levity, return with his warm beams, and cheering influences, to the contaminated mansion from which he has been driven out? Is it wonderful if finding no entrance into a heart filled with vanity he should withdraw himself?—We cannot, in retiring into our closets, change our natures as we do our cloaths. The disposition we carry thither will be likely to remain with us. We have no right to expect that a new temper will meet us at the door. We can only hope that the spirit we bring thither will be cherished and improved. It is not easy, rather it is not possible, to graft genuine devotion

on

on a life of an opposite tendency ; nor can we delight ourselves regularly for a few stated moments, in that God whom we have not been serving during the day. We may, indeed, to quiet our conscience, take up the employment of prayer, but cannot take up the state of mind which will make the employment beneficial to ourselves, or the prayer acceptable to God, if all the previous day we have been careless of ourselves, and unmindful of our Maker. *They* will not pray differently from the rest of the world, who do not live differently.

What a contradiction is it to lament the weakness, the misery, and the corruption of our nature, in our devotions, and then to rush into a life, though not perhaps of vice, yet of indulgences, calculated to increase that weakness, to inflame those corruptions, and to lead to that misery ! There is either no meaning in our prayers, or no sense in our conduct. In the one we mock God, in the other we deceive ourselves.

Will not he who keeps up an habitual intercourse

tercourse with his Maker, who is vigilant in thought, self-denying in action, who strives to keep his heart from wrong desires, his mind from vain imaginations, and his lips from idle words, bring a more prepared spirit, a more collected mind, be more engaged, more penetrated, more present to the occasion? Will he not feel more delight in this devout exercise, reap more benefit from it, than he who lives at random, prays from custom, and who, though he dares not intermit the form, is a stranger to its spirit.

We speak not here to the self-sufficient formalist, or the careless profligate. Among those whom we now take the liberty to address, are to be found, especially in the higher class of females, the amiable and the interesting, and, in many respects, the virtuous and correct: --- characters so engaging, so evidently made for better things, so capable of reaching high degrees of excellence, so formed to give the tone to Christian practice, as well as to fashion, so calculated to give a beautiful impression of that religion which

which they profess without sufficiently adorning ; which they believe without fairly exemplifying ; that we cannot forbear taking a tender interest in their welfare, we cannot forbear breathing a fervent prayer, that they may yet reach the elevation for which they were intended ; that they may hold out a uniform and consistent pattern, of “ whatsoever things are pure, honest, just, lovely, and of good report ! ” This the Apostle goes on to intimate can only be done by THINKING ON THESE THINGS. Things can only influence our practice as they engage our attention. Would not then a confirmed habit of serious thought tend to correct that inconsideration, which we are willing to hope, more than want of principle, lies at the bottom of the inconsistency we are lamenting ?

If, as it is generally allowed, the great difficulty of our spiritual life is to make the future predominate over the present, do we not, by the conduct we are regretting, aggravate what it is in our power to diminish ?

Miscalculation of the relative value of things is one of the greatest errors of our moral life. We estimate them in an inverse proportion to their value, as well as to their duration : we lavish earnest and durable thoughts on things so trifling that they deserve little regard, so brief that they “ perish with the using,” while we bestow only flight attention, on things of infinite worth ; only transient thoughts, on things of eternal duration.

Those who are so far conscientious as not to intermit a regular course of devotion, and who yet allow themselves at the same time to go on in a course of amusements which excite a directly opposite spirit, are inconceivably augmenting their own difficulties. They are eagerly heaping up fuel in the day, on the fire which they intend to extinguish in the evening ; they are voluntarily adding to the temptations, against which they mean to request grace to struggle. To acknowlege at the same time, that we find it hard to serve God as we ought, and yet to be systematically indulging

indulging habits, which must naturally increase the difficulty, makes our character almost ridiculous, while it renders our duty almost impracticable.

While we make our way more difficult by these very indulgences with which we think to cheer and refresh it, the determined Christian becomes his own pioneer ; he makes his path comparatively easy by voluntarily clearing it of the obstacles which impede his progress.

These habitual indulgences seem a contradiction to that obvious law, that one virtue always involves another ; for we cannot labour after any grace, that of prayer for instance, without resisting whatever is opposite to it. If then we lament, that it is so hard to serve God, let us not by our conduct furnish arguments against ourselves ; for, as if the difficulty were not great enough in itself, we are continually heaping up mountains in our way, by indulging in such pursuits and passions, as make a small labour an insurmountable one.

We may often judge better of our state by the result, than by the act of prayer, our very defects, our coldness, deadness, wanderings, may leave more contrition on the soul, than the happiest turn of thought. The feeling of our wants, the confession of our sins, the acknowledgment of our dependence, the renunciation of ourselves, the supplication for mercy, the application to "the fountain opened for sin," the cordial entreaty for the aid of the Spirit, the relinquishment of our own will, resolutions of better obedience, petitions that these resolutions may be directed and sanctified, these are the subjects in which the suppliant should be engaged, by which his thoughts should be absorbed. Can they be so absorbed, if many of the intervening hours are passed in pursuits of a totally different complexion? pursuits which raise the passions which we are seeking to allay? Will the cherished vanities go at our bidding? Will the required dispositions come at our calling? Do we find our tempers so obedient, our passions

passions so obsequious in the other concerns of life? If not, what reason have we to expect their obsequiousness in this grand concern? We should therefore endeavour to believe as we pray, to think as we pray, to feel as we pray, and to act as we pray. Prayer must not be a solitary, independent exercise; but an exercise interwoven with many, and inseparably connected with that golden chain of Christian duties, of which, when so connected, it forms one of the most important links.

Let us be careful that our cares, occupations and amusements may be always such that we may not be afraid to implore the divine blessing on them; this is the criterion of their safety and of our duty. Let us endeavour that in each, in all, one continually growing sentiment and feeling of loving, serving, and pleasing God, maintain its predominant station in the heart.

An additional reason why we should live in the perpetual use of prayer, seems to be, that our blessed Redeemer, after having given

both the example and the command, while on earth, condescends still to be our unceasing intercessor in Heaven. Can we ever cease petitioning for ourselves, when we believe that he never ceases interceding for us?

If we are so unhappy as now to find little pleasure in this holy exercise, that however is so far from being a reason for discontinuing it, that it affords the strongest argument for perseverance. That which was at first a form, will become a pleasure; that which was a burden will become a privilege; that which we impose upon ourselves as a medicine, will become necessary as an aliment, and desirable as a gratification. That which is now short and superficial, will become copious and solid. The chariot-wheel is warmed by its own motion. Use will make that easy which was at first painful. That which is once become easy will soon be rendered pleasant. Instead of repining at the performance, we shall be unhappy at the omission. When a man recovering from sickness attempts to walk, he does not dif-

discontinuc the exercise because he feels himself weak, nor even because the effort is painful. He rather redoubles his exertion. It is from his perseverance that he looks for strength. An additional turn every day diminishes his repugnance, augments his vigour, improves his spirits. That effort which was submitted to because it was salutary, is continued because the feeling of renovated strength renders it delightful.

CHAP. VII.

The Love of God.

OUR love to God arises out of want. God's love to us out of fulness. Our indigence draws us to that power which can relieve, and to that goodness which can bless us. His overflowing love delights to make us partakers of the bounties he graciously imparts, not only in the gifts of his Providence, but in the richer communications of his grace. We are first drawn to love him from the consideration of his mercies, from the experience of his bounties; but this consideration and this experience in a rightly-turned mind lead us to love him for his own excellencies. We can only be said to love God, when we endeavour to glorify him, when we desire a participation of his nature, when we study to imitate his perfections.

We

We are sometimes inclined to suspect the love of God to us. We are too little suspicious of our want of love to him. Yet if we examine the case by evidence, as we should examine any common question, what real instances can we produce of our love to Him? What imaginable instance can we not produce of his love to us? If neglect, forgetfulness, ingratitude, disobedience, coldness in our affections, deadness in our duty, be evidences of our love to him, such evidences, but such only, we can abundantly allege. If life and all the countless catalogue of mercies that makes life pleasant, be proofs of his love to us, these he has given us in hand;—if life eternal, if blessedness that knows no measure and no end, be proofs of love, these he has given us in promise—to the Christian we had almost said, he has given them in possession.

When the adoring soul is gratefully expatiating on the inexhaustible instances of the love of God to us, let it never forget to rise to its most exalted pitch, to rest on

its loftiest object, *His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.* This is the crowning point ; this is the gift which imparts their highest value to all his other gifts. It combines whatever can render divine munificence complete :— pardon of sin, acceptance with God, perfection and perpetuity of blessedness. Well may the Christian in the devout contemplation of this sublime mystery, which the highest of all created intelligences “desire to look into,” exclaim in grateful rapture, “Thou art the God that doest wonders !” A redeemed world is the triumph of infinity. Power and goodness, truth and mercy, righteousness and peace, incorporated and lost in each other !

Love is a grace of such pre-eminent distinction, that the Redeemer is emphatically designated by it. To HIM THAT LOVED us. This is such a characteristic style and title that no name is appended to it.

It must be an irksome thing to serve a master whom we do not love ; a master whom we

we are compelled to obey, though we think his requisitions hard, and his commands unreasonable ; under whose eye we know that we continually live, though his presence is not only undelightful but formidable.

Now every creature must obey God; whether he love him or not ; he must act always in his sight, whether he delight in him or not ; and to a heart of any feeling, to a spirit of any liberality, nothing is so grating as constrained obedience. To love God, to serve him because we love him, is therefore no less our highest happiness, than our most bounden duty.. Love makes all labor light. We serve with alacrity, where we love with cordiality.

Where the heart is devoted to an object, we require not to be perpetually reminded of our obligations to obey him : they present themselves spontaneously, we fulfil them readily, I had almost said, involuntarily ; we think not so much of the service as of the object. The principle which suggests the work inspires the pleasure ; to neglect it

would be an injury to our feelings. The performance is the gratification. The omission is not more a pain to the conscience, than a wound to the affections. The implantation of this vital root perpetuates virtuous practice, and secures internal peace.

Though we cannot be always thinking of God, we may be always employed in his service. There must be intervals of our communion with him, but there must be no intermission of our attachment to him. The tender father who labours for his children, does not always employ his thoughts about them; he cannot be always conversing with them, or concerning them, yet he is always engaged in promoting their interests. His affections for them is an inwoven principle, of which he gives the most unequivocal evidence, by the assiduousness of his application in their service.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart," is the primary law of our Religion. Yet how apt are we to complain that we *cannot* love God, that we can-

not maintain a devout intercourse with him. But would God, who is all justice, have commanded that of which he knew we were incapable? Would he who is all mercy have made our eternal happiness to depend on something which he knew was out of our power to perform, capriciously disqualifying us for the duty he had prescribed? Would he have given the exhortation, and withheld the capacity? This would be to charge Omnipotence with folly, and Infinite Goodness with injustice — no, when he made duty and happiness inseparable, he neither made our duty impracticable, nor our happiness unattainable. But we are continually flying to false refuges, clinging to false holds, resting on false supports: as they are uncertain they disappoint us, as they are weak they fail us; but as they are numerous, when one fails, another presents itself. Till they slip from under us, we never suspect how much we rested upon them. Life glides away in a perpetual succession of these false dependences and successive privations.

Though we may be in a state of acceptance with God, without those feelings of joy and confidence which some consider as the only evidences of safety, yet let us remember that these, though not indispensable, are most desirable characters of religion. Let us be patient if we do not possess such a state of mind, but let us never be satisfied not to desire it. Let us especially never rest contented while ordinary amusements, worldly events, pleasing society excite a feeling of delight which religion has never yet excited in us. Let us be humbled but not terrified, if it please God to withhold from us this. "peace and joy in believing;" but let us feel a deep self-abasement to observe with what different sensations we receive the impressions which the pleasures of sense convey to us; that though from a principle of conscience we follow up our religious exercises, yet that God only receives from us a duty of necessity and obligation, of coldness and constraint, while the worldly pursuits monopolize our pleasurable feelings as well as our time and thoughts.

There

There is, as we have elsewhere observed, a striking analogy between the natural and spiritual life, the weakness and helplessness of the Christian resemble those of the infant; neither of them becomes strong, vigorous, and full grown at once, but through a long and often painful course. This keeps up a sense of dependence, and accustoms us to lean on the hand which fosters us. There is in both conditions, an imperceptible chain of depending circumstances, by which we are carried on insensibly to the vigour of maturity. The operation which is not always obvious, is always progressive. By attempting to walk alone, we discover our weakness, the experience of that weakness humbles us, and every fall drives us back to the sustaining hand, whose assistance we vainly flattered ourselves we no longer needed.

In some halcyon moments we are willing to persuade ourselves that Religion has made an entire conquest over our heart: that we have renounced the dominion of the world,

world, have conquered our attachment to earthly things. We flatter ourselves that nothing can now again obstruct our entire submission. But we know not what spirit we are of. We say this in the calm of repose and in the stillness of the passions; when our path is smooth, our prospect smiling, danger distant, temptation absent, when we have many comforts and no trials. Suddenly, some loss, some disappointment, some privation tears off the mask, reveals us to ourselves. We at once discover that though the smaller fibres and lesser roots which fasten us down to earth may have been loosened by preceding storms, yet our substantial hold on earth is not shaken, the tap root is not cut, we are yet fast rooted to the soil, and still stronger tempests must be sent to make us let go our hold.

In all Academical Institutions a broad foundation is provided, and a large stock of general preparatory study is proposed to be laid in before it is determined to what particular profession the student shall be called.

The

The preliminary pursuits are afterwards convertible to such individual purposes as may eventually arise. That student would be but indifferently qualified for his own profession without this large initiatory basis. The spiritual character should be formed somewhat in the same manner with the intellectual. We must be prepared by a general previous discipline to meet all the dispensations of divine Providence, without knowing to what specific trials and duties we may be called out. It is not enough therefore that we meet expected events with submission to the will of God ; we must strive after such a general spirit of acquiescence as shall fit us for those that are unforeseen. In such a world as this, sudden attacks, unlooked for assaults must be met with a spirit armed for the conflict. We should live, not in the tormenting dread of indefinite evils, but with the expectation of their probable occurrence ; for encountering which a stock of superinduced strength laid in by habitual prayer will be the only armour. We must not presumptuously

tuously trust for safety under trials to the resistance we fancy we shall then be able to make, so much as to the collected forces of antecedent piety; for the grace of resistance may be withheld where habits of piety have not been cultivated.

It might be useful to adopt the habit of stating our own case as strongly to ourselves as if it were the case of another; to express in so many words, thoughts which are not apt to assume any specific or palpable form; thoughts which we avoid shaping into language, but slur over, generalize, soften, and do away. How indignant, for instance, should we feel (though we ourselves make the complaint) to be told by others, that we do not love our Maker and Preserver. But let us put the question fairly to ourselves. Do we really love him? Do we love him with a supreme, nay, even with an equal affection? Is there no friend, no child, no reputation, no pleasure, no society, no possession which we do not prefer to him? It is easy to affirm in a general way that there is

is not. But let us particularize, individualize the question—bring it home to our own hearts in some actual instance, in some tangible shape. Let us commune with our own consciences, with our own feelings, with our own experience : let us question pointedly, and answer honestly. Let us not be more ashamed to detect the fault, than to have been guilty of it.

This then will commonly be the result. Let the friend, child, reputation, possession, pleasure be endangered, but especially let it be taken away by some stroke of Providence. The scales fall from our eyes ; we see, we feel, we acknowledge, with brokenness of heart, not only for our loss, but for our sin, that though we did love God, yet we loved him not superlatively ; that we loved the blessing, threatened or resumed, still more. But this is one of the cases in which “ the goodness of God bringeth us to repentance.” By the operation of his grace the resumption of the gift brings back the heart to the giver. The Almighty by his spirit takes

takes possession of the Temple from which the idol is driven out : God is reinstated in his rights, and becomes the supreme and undisputed Lord of our reverential affection.

There are three requisites to our proper enjoyment of every earthly blessing which Gods bestows on us — a thankful reflection on the goodness of the giver, a deep sense of the unworthiness of the receiver, and a sober recollection of the precarious tenure by which we hold it. The first would make us grateful, the second humble, the last moderate.

But how seldom do we receive his favours in this spirit ! As if religious gratitude were to be confined to the appointed days of public thanksgiving, how rarely in common society do we hear any recognition of Omnipotence even on those striking and heart-rejoicing occasions, when “ with his own right hand, and with his holy arm, He has gotten himself the victory !” Let us never detract from the merit of our valiant leaders, but rather honour them the more
for

for this manifestation of divine power in their favour ; but let us never lose sight of Him “ who teacheth their hands to war and their fingers to fight.” Let us never forget that “ He is the Rock, that his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment.”

How many seem to show not only their want of assurance in God, but that “ he is not in all their thoughts,” by their appearing to leave him entirely out of their concerns, by projecting their affairs without any reference to him, by setting out on the stock of their own unassisted wisdom, contriving and acting independently of God ; expecting prosperity in the event, without seeking his direction in the outset, and taking to themselves the whole honour of the success without any recognition of his hand ; do they not thus virtually imitate what Sophocles makes his blustering Atheist* boast. “ Let other men expect to conquer with the assistance of the Gods, I intend to gain honour without them.”

* Ajax.

The Christian will rather rejoice to ascribe the glory of his prosperity to the same hand to which our own manly Queen gladly ascribed her signal victory. When after the defeat of the Armada, impiously termed Invincible, her enemies, in order to lower the value of her agency, alleged that the victory was not owing to her, but to God who had raised the storm, she heroically declared that the visible interference of God in her favour, was that part of the success from which she derived the truest honour.

Incidents and occasions every day arise, which not only call on us to trust in God, but which furnish us with suitable occasions of vindicating, if I may presume to use the expression, the character and conduct of the Almighty in the government of human affairs; yet there is no duty which we perform with less alacrity. Strange, that we should treat the Lord of heaven and earth with less confidence than we exercise towards each other! That we should vindicate the honour of a common acquaintance with more zeal than

than that of our insulted Maker and Preserver !

If we hear a friend accused of any act of injustice, though we cannot bring any positive proof why he should be acquitted of this specific charge, yet we resent the injury offered to his character ; we clear him of the individual allegation on the ground of his general conduct, inferring that from the numerous instances we can produce of his rectitude on other occasions, he cannot be guilty of the alleged injustice. We reason from analogy, and in general we reason fairly. But when we presume to judge of the Most High, instead of vindicating his rectitude on the same grounds, under a Providence seemingly severe ; instead of reverting, as in the case of our friend, to the thousand instances we have formerly tasted of his kindness, instead of giving God the same credit we give to his erring creature, and inferring from his past goodness, that the present inexplicable dispensation must be consistent, though we cannot explain how,
with

with his general character, we mutinously accuse him of inconsistency, nay of injustice. We admit virtually the most monstrous anomaly in the character of the perfect God.

But what a clue has Revelation furnished to the intricate labyrinth which seems to involve the conduct which we impiously question ! It unrolls the volume of Divine Providence, lays open the mysterious map of infinite wisdom, throws a bright light on the darkest dispensations, vindicates the inequality of appearances, and points to that blessed region, where to all who have truly loved and served God, every apparent wrong shall be proved to have been unimpeachably right, every affliction a mercy, and the severest trials the choicest blessings.

So blind has sin made us, that the glory of God is concealed from us, by the very means which, could we discern aright, would display it. That train of second causes, which he has so marvellously disposed, obstructs our view of himself. We are so filled with wonder at the immediate effect, that

that our short sight penetrates not to the first cause. To see him as he is, is reserved to be the happiness of a better world. We shall then indeed “admire him in his Saints, and in all them that believe;” we shall see how necessary it was for those whose bliss is now so perfect, to have been poor, and despised, and oppressed. We shall see why the “ungodly were in such prosperity.” Let us give God credit here for what we shall then fully know; let us adore now, what we shall understand hereafter.

They who take up Religion on a false ground will never adhere to it. If they adopt it merely for the peace and pleasantness it brings, they will desert it as soon as they find their adherence to it will bring them into difficulty, distress, or discredit. It seldom answers therefore to attempt making proselytes by hanging out false colours. The Christian “endures as seeing him who is invisible.” He who adopts Religion for the sake of immediate enjoyment, will not do a virtuous action that is disagreeable

able to himself ; nor resist a temptation that is alluring, present pleasure being his motive. There is no sure basis for virtue but the love of God in Christ Jesus, and the bright reversion for which that love is pledged. Without this, as soon as the paths of piety become rough and thorny, we shall stray into pleasanter pastures.

Religion however has her own peculiar advantages. In the transactions of all worldly affairs, there are many and great difficulties. There may be several ways out of which to chuse. Men of the first understanding are not always certain which of these ways is the best. Persons of the deepest penetration are full of doubt and perplexity ; their minds are undecided how to act, lest while they pursue one road, they may be neglecting another, which might better have conducted them to their proposed end.

In Religion the case is different, and in this respect, easy. As a Christian can have but one object in view, he is also certain there is but one way of attaining it. Where there

there is but one end it prevents all possibility of chusing wrong, where there is but one road it takes away all perplexity as to the course of pursuit. That we so often wander wide of the mark, is not from any want of plainness in the path, but from the perverseness of our will in not chusing it, from the indolence of our minds in not following it up.

In our attachments to earthly things even the most innocent, there is always a danger of excess, but from this danger we are here perfectly exempt, for there is no possibility of excess in our love to that Being who has demanded *the whole heart*. This peremptory requisition cuts off all debate. Had God required only a portion, even were it a large portion, we might be puzzled in settling the quantum. We might be plotting how large a part we might venture to keep back without absolutely forfeiting our safety; we might be haggling for deductions, bargaining for abatements, and be perpetually compromising with our

Maker. But the injunction is entire, the command is definite, the portion is unequivocal. Though it is so compressed in the expression, yet it is so expansive and ample in the measure; it is so distinct a claim, so imperative a requisition of *all* the faculties of the mind, and strength; *all* the affections of the heart and soul; that there is not the least opening left for litigation; no place for any thing but absolute unreserved compliance. But though our love of God can never be excessive in the degree, yet the expression of that love may be indiscreet, the exercise of it may be eccentric. We may debase that which is noble by low and puerile language; we may tarnish that which is pure by grossness; and disorder it by irregularity. Though the principle may be sound there may be illusion in its application. Our love must operate in such instances as God has commanded; and not in such as superstition has devised or enthusiasm invented. The pure fountain must not be polluted with earthly infusions; the expression

expression of our love to our heavenly Father must not be degraded by images borrowed from human passions, nor dis-honoured by ideas, nor rendered grossly familiar by phrases which are scarcely pardonable even when applied to those passions.

Every thing which relates to God is infinite. We must therefore, while we keep our hearts humble, keep our aims high. Our highest services indeed are but finite, imperfect. But as God is unlimited in goodness, he should have our unlimited love. The best we can offer is poor, but let us not withhold that best. He deserves incomparably more than we have to give; let us not give him less than all. If he has ennobled our corrupt nature with spiritual affections, let us not refuse them noblest aspirations, to their noblest object. Let him not behold us so prodigally ravishing our affections for the meanest of his bounties, as to have nothing left for himself. As the standard of every thing in religion is high, let us endeavour to act in it with the highest

intention of mind, with the largest use of our faculties. Let us obey him with the most intense love, adore him with the most fervent gratitude. Let us “praise him according to his excellent greatness.” Let us serve him with all the strength of our capacity, with all the devotion of our will.

Grace being a new principle added to our natural powers, as it determines the desires to a higher object, so it adds vigour to their activity. We shall best prove its dominion over us by desiring to exert ourselves in the cause of Heaven with the same energy with which we once exerted ourselves in the cause of the world. The world was too little to fill our whole capacity. Scaliger lamented how much was lost because so fine a poet as Claudio, in his choice of a subject, wanted matter worthy of his talents: but it is the felicity of the Christian to have chosen a theme to which all the powers of his heart, and of his understanding will be found inadequate. It is the glory of religion to supply an object worthy of the entire consecra-

tion of every power, faculty, and affection of an immaterial, immortal being.—Christianity demands the energies of the entire man ; its worship the choicest portion of his time ; its doctrines the strenuous exertion of his intellectual powers ; its duties the stretch and compass of his widest endeavours ; its truths the highest exercise of his faith ; its promises of his hopes. It presents objects commensurate to those large capacities, and inextinguishable desires which God gave him when he provided a blessedness so worthy to fill and satisfy them.

CHAP. VIII.

The Hand of God to be acknowledged in the daily Circumstances of Life.

IF we would indeed love God let us "acquaint ourselves with him." The word of inspiration has assured us that there is no other way to "be at peace." As we cannot love an unknown God, so neither can we know him, or even approach toward that knowledge, but on the terms which he himself holds out to us; neither will he favor us but in the method which he has himself prescribed. His very perfections, the just objects of our adoration, all stand in the way of creatures so guilty. His justice is the flaming sword which excludes us from the Paradise we have forfeited. His purity is so opposed to our corruptions, his omnipotence to our infirmity, his wisdom to our folly, that had we not to plead the great propitiation, those very attributes which are now our trust, would

would be our terror. The most opposite images of human conception; the widest extremes of human language, are used for the purpose of shewing what God is to us, in our natural state, and what he is under the Christian dispensation. The “‘consuming fire” is transformed into essential “‘love.”

But as we cannot find out the Almighty to perfection, so we cannot love him with that pure flame which animates glorified spirits. But there is a preliminary acquaintance with him, an initial love of him, for which he has furnished us with means by his works, by his word, and by his Spirit. Even in this bleak and barren soil some germs will shoot, some blossoms will open, of that celestial plant, which watered by the dews of heaven, and ripened by the Sun of Righteousness, will, in a more genial clime, expand into the fulness of perfection, and bear immortal fruits in the Paradise of God.

A person of a cold phlegmatic temper, who laments that he wants that fervour in his love of the Supreme Being, which is apparent,

in more ardent characters, may take comfort, if he find the same indifference respecting his worldly attachments. But if his affections are intense towards the perishable things of earth, while they are dead to such as are spiritual, it does not prove that he is destitute of passions, but only that they are not directed to the proper object. If however he love God with that measure of feeling with which God has endowed him, he will not be punished or rewarded because the stock is greater or smaller than that of some other of his fellow-creatures.

In those intervals when our sense of divine things is weak and low, we must not give way to distrust, but warm our hearts with the recollection of our best moments. Our motives to love and gratitude are not now diminished, but our spiritual frame is lower, our natural spirits are weaker. Where there is languor there will be discouragement. But we must not desist. "Faint yet pursuing" must be the Christian's motto.

There is more merit (if ever we are apply-

so arrogant a word to our worthless efforts) in persevering under depression and discomfit, than in the happiest flow of devotion, when the tide of health and spirits runs high. Where there is less gratification there is more disinterestedness. We ought to consider it as a cheering evidence, that our love may be equally pure though it is not equally fervent, when we persist in serving our heavenly Father with the same constancy, though it may please him to withdraw from us the same consolations. Perseverance may bring us to the very dispositions the absence of which we are lamenting.—“ O tarry thou the Lord’s leisure, be strong and he shall comfort thy heart.”

We are too ready to imagine that we are religious because we know something of religion. We appropriate to ourselves the pious sentiments we read, and we talk as if the thoughts of other men’s heads were really the feeling of our own hearts. But piety has not its seat in the memory, but in

the affections, for which however the memory is an excellent purveyor, though a bad substitute. Instead of an undue elation of heart when we peruse some of the Psalmist's beautiful effusions, we should feel a deep self-abasement at the reflection, that however our case may sometimes resemble his, yet how inapplicable to our hearts are the ardent expressions of his repentance, the overflowing of his gratitude, the depth of his submission, the entireness of his self-dedication, the fervor of his love. But he who indeed can once say with him "Thou art my portion," will like him surrender himself unreservedly to his service.

It is important that we never suffer our faith, any more than our love, to be depressed or elevated, by mistaking for its own operations, the ramblings of a busy imagination. The steady principle of faith must not look for its character, to the vagaries of a mutable and fantastic Fancy—*La folle de la Watson*, as she has been well denominated.

Faith

Faith which has once fixed her foot on the immutable rock of ages, fastened her firm eye on the cross, and stretched out her triumphant hand to seize the promised crown, will not suffer her stability to depend on this ever-shifting faculty ; she will not be driven to despair, by the blackest shades of its pencil, nor be betrayed into a careless security, by its most flattering and vivid colours.

One cause of the fluctuations of our faith is, that we are too ready to judge the Almighty by our own low standard. We judge him not by his own declarations of what he is, and what he will do, but by our own feelings and practices. We ourselves are too little disposed to forgive those who have offended us. We therefore conclude that God cannot pardon our offences. We suspect him to be implacable because we are apt to be so, and we are unwilling to believe that he can pass by injuries, because we find it so hard to do it. When we do forgive, it is grudgingly and superficially ; we there-

fore infer that God cannot forgive freely and fully. We make a hypocritical distinction between forgiving and forgetting injuries. God clears away the score ~~when~~ he grants the pardon. He does not only say, " thy sins and thy iniquities will I forgive," but " I will *remember* no more."

We are disposed to urge the smallness of our offences, as a plea for their forgiveness; whereas God, to exhibit the boundlessness of his own mercy, has taught us to alledge a plea directly contrary, " Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great." To natural reason this argument of David is most extraordinary. But while he felt that the greatness of his own iniquity left him no resource, but in the mercy of God, he felt that God's mercy was greater even than his own sin. What a large, what a magnificent idea, does it give us of the divine power and goodness that the believer, instead of pleading the smallness of his own offences as a motive for pardon, pleads only the abundance of the Divine compassion!

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We are told that it is the duty of the Christian to "seek God." We assent to the truth of the proposition. Yet it would be less irksome to corrupt nature, in pursuit of this knowledge, to go a pilgrimage to distant lands, than to seek him within our own hearts. Our own heart is the true *terra incognita*; a land more foreign and unknown to us, than the regions of the polar circle: yet that heart is the place, in which an acquaintance with God must be sought. It is there we must worship him, if we would worship him in spirit and in truth.

But, alas! the heart is not the home of a worldly man, it is scarcely the home of a Christian. If business and pleasure are the natural element of the generality; a dreary vacuity, sloth, and insensibility, too often worse than both, discline, disqualify too many Christians for the pursuit.

I have observed, and I think I have heard others observe, that a common beggar had rather screen himself under the wall of a churchyard, if overtaken by a shower of rain, though

though the church-doors stand invitingly open, than take shelter within it, while Divine service is performing. It is a less annoyance to him to be drenched with the storm, than to enjoy the convenience of a shelter and a seat, if he must enjoy them at the heavy price of listening to the Sermon.

While we condemn the beggar, let us look into our own hearts ; happy if we cannot there detect somewhat of the same indolence, indisposition, and distaste to serious things ! Happy, if we do not find, that we prefer not only our pleasure and enjoyments, but, I had almost said, our very pains, and vexations, and inconveniences, to communing with our Maker ! Happy, if we had not rather be absorbed in our petty cares, and little disturbances, provided we can contrive to make them the means of occupying our thoughts, filling up our minds, and drawing them away from that devout intercourse, which demands the liveliest exercise of our rational powers, the highest elevation,

elevation of our spiritual affections! Is it not to be apprehended, that the dread of being driven to this sacred intercourse, is one grand cause of that activity, and restlessness, which sets the world in such perpetual motion?

Though we are ready to express a general sense of our confidence in Almighty goodness, yet what definite meaning do we annex to the expression? What practical evidences have we to produce, that we really do trust him? Does this trust deliver us from worldly anxiety? Does it exonerate us from the same perturbation of spirit, which those endure who make no such profession? Does it relieve the mind from doubt and distrust? Does it tranquillize the troubled heart, does it regulate its disorders, and compose its fluctuations? Does it sooth us under irritation? Does it support us under trials? Does it fortify us against temptations? Does it lead us to repose a full confidence in that Being whom we profess to trust? Does it produce in us

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"that work of righteousness which is peace," that effect of righteousness, which is "quietness and assurance for ever?" Do we commit ourselves and our concerns to God in word, or in reality? Does this implicit reliance simplify our desires? Does it induce us to credit the testimony of his word and the promises of his Gospel? Do we not even entertain some secret suspicions of his faithfulness and truth in our hearts, when we persuade others and try to persuade ourselves that we unreservedly trust him?

In the preceding Chapter we endeavoured to illustrate our want of Love to God by our not being as forward to *vindicate* the divine conduct as to justify that of an acquaintance. The same illustration may express our reluctance to *trust* in God. If a tried friend engage to do us a kindness, though he may not think it necessary to explain the particular manner in which he intends to do it, we repose on his word. Assured of the result, we are neither very inquisitive about the mode nor the detail. But do we treat

treat our Almighty friend with the same liberal confidence? Are we not murmuring because we cannot see all the process of his administration, and follow his movements step by step? Do we wait the development of his plan, in full assurance that the issue will be ultimately good? Do we trust that he is as abundantly willing as able to do more for us than we can ask or think, if by our suspicions we do not offend him, if by our infidelity we do not provoke him? In short do we not think ourselves utterly undone, when we have only Providence to trust to?

We are perhaps ready enough to acknowledge God in our mercies, nay, we confess him in the ordinary enjoyments of life. In some of these common mercies, as in a bright day, a refreshing shower, delightful scenery; a kind of positive pleasure, an hilarity of spirits, a sort of animal enjoyment, though of a refined nature, mixes itself with our devotional feelings; and though we confess and adore the bountiful Giver,

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we do it with a little mixture of self-com'g' plaeancy, and of human gratification, which he pardons and accepts.

But we must look for him in scenes less animating, we must acknowledge him on occasions less exhilarating, less sensibly gratifying. It is not only in his promises that God manifests his mercy. His threatenings are proofs of the same compassionate love. He threatens, not to punish, but by the warning, to snatch from the punishment.

We may also trace marks of his hand not only in the awfel visitations of life, not only in the severer dispensations of his Providence, but in vexations ~~for trivial~~ that we should hesitate to suspect that they are Providential appointments, did we not know that our daily life is made up of unimportant circumstances rather than of great events. As they are however of sufficient importance to exercise the Christian tempers and affections, we may trace the hand of our heavenly father in those daily little disappointments, and hourly vexatious, which occur even in the

the most prosperous state, and which are inseparable from the condition of humanity. We must trace that same beneficent hand, secretly at work for our purification, our correction, our weaning from life, in the imperfections and disagreeableness of those who may be about us, in the perverseness of those with whom we transact business, and in those interruptions which break in on our favourite engagements.

We are perhaps too much addicted to our innocent delights, or we are too fond of our leisure, of our learned, even of our religious leisure. But while we say, "it is good for us to be here," the divine vision is withdrawn, and we are compelled to come down from the mount. Or, perhaps, we do not improve our retirement for the purposes for which it was granted, and to which we had resolved to devote it, and our time is broken in upon to make us more sensible of its value. Or we feel a complacency in our retirement, a pride in our books; perhaps we feel proud of the good things we are intending.

tending to say, or meditating to write, or preparing to do. A check is necessary, yet it is given in a way almost imperceptible. The hand that gives it is unseen, is unsuspected, yet it is the same gracious hand which directs the most important events of life. An importunate application, a disqualifying though not severe indisposition, a family avocation, a letter important to the writer, but unseasonable to us, breaks in on our projected privacy; calls us to a sacrifice of our inclination, to a renunciation of our own will. These incessant trials of temper, if well improved, may be more salutary to the mind, than the finest passage we had intended to read, or the sublimest sentiment we had fancied we should write.

Instead then of going in search of great mortifications, as a certain class of pious writers recommend, let us cheerfully bear, and diligently improve these inferior trials which God prepares for us. Submission to a cross which he inflicts, to a disappointment which he sends, to a contradiction of our self-love, which

which he appoints, is a far better exercise, than great penances of our own chusing. Perpetual conquests over impatience, ill-temper, and self-will, indicate a better spirit than any self-imposed mortifications. We may traverse oceans and scale mountains on uncommanded pilgrimages, without pleasing God ; we may please him without any other exertion than by crossing our own will.

Perhaps you had been busying your imagination with some projected scheme, not only lawful but laudable. The design was radically good, but the supposed value of your own agency, might too much interfere, might a little taint the purity of your best intentions. The motives were so mixed that it was difficult to separate them. Sudden sickness obstructed the design. You naturally lament the failure, not perceiving that, however good the work might be for others, the sickness was better for yourself. An act of charity was in your intention, but God saw that your soul required the exercise of

of a more difficult virtue; that humility and resignation, that the patience, acquiescence, and contrition of a sick bed, were more necessary for you. He accepts the meditated work as far as it was designed for his glory, but he calls his servant to other duties, which were more salutary for him, and of which the master was the better judge. He sets aside his work, and orders him to wait; the more difficult part of his task. As far as your motive was pure, you will receive the reward of your unperformed charity, though not the gratification of the performance. If it was not pure, you are rescued from the danger attending a right action performed on a worldly principle. You may be the better Christian though one good deed is subtracted from your catalogue.

By a life of activity and usefulness, you had perhaps attracted the public esteem. An animal activity had partly stimulated your exertions. The love of reputation begins to mix itself with your better motives. You do not, it is presumed, act entirely, or

chiefly for human applause; but you are too sensible to it. It is a delicious poison which begins to infuse itself into your purest cup. You acknowledge indeed the sublimity of higher motives, but do you never feel that, separated from this accompaniment of self, they would be too abstracted, too speculative, and might become too little productive both of activity and of sensible gratification? You begin to feel the human incentive necessary, and your spirits would probably flag if it were withdrawn.

This sensibility to praise would gradually tarnish the purity of your best actions. He who sees your heart, as well as your works, mercifully snatches you from the perils of prosperity. Malice is awakened. Your most meritorious actions are ascribed to the most corrupt motives. You are attacked just where your character is least vulnerable. The enemies whom your success raised up, are raised up by God, less to punish than to save you. We are far from meaning that he can ever be the author of evil; he does

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not excite or approve the calumny, but he uses your calumniators as instruments of your purification. Your fame was too dear to you. It is a costly sacrifice, but God requires it. It must be offered up. You would gladly compound for any, for every other offering, but this is the offering he chuses: and while he graciously continues to employ you for his glory, he thus teaches you to renounce your own. He sends this trial as a test by which you are to try yourself. He thus instructs you not to abandon your Christian exertions, but to elevate the principle which inspired them, to discale it from all impure admixtures.

By thus stripping the most engaging employments of this dangerous delight, by infusing some drops of salutary bitterness into your sweetest draught, by some of these ill-tasted but wholesome mercies, he graciously compels us to return to himself. By taking away the stays by which we are perpetually propping up our frail delights, they fall to the ground. We are, as it were, driven back

back to Him, who condescends to receive us, after we have tried every thing else, and after every thing else has failed us, and though he knows we should not have returned to him if every thing else had *not* failed us. He makes us feel our weakness, that we may have recourse to his strength, he makes us sensible of our hitherto unperceived sins, that we may take refuge in his everlasting compassion.

CHAP. IX.

Christianity universal in its Requisitions.

It is not unusual to see people get rid of some of the most awful injunctions, and emancipate themselves from some of the most solemn requisitions of Scripture, by affecting to believe that they do not apply to . . . They consider them as belonging exclusively to the first age of the Gospel, and to the individuals to whom they were immediately addressed; consequently the necessity to observe them does not extend to persons under an established Christian, or hereditary Christians.

These exceptions are particularly applied to one of the leading directions, so forcibly and repeatedly pressed in the Epistles. The authors endeavour to persuade themselves that it was only the Ephesians "who were dead in trespasses and sins"—that it was

was only the Galatians who were enjoined “not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh”—that it was only the Philippians who were “enemies to the Cross of Christ.” They shelter themselves under the comfortable assurance of a geographical security. As they know that they are neither Ephesians, Galatians, nor Philippians, they have, of course, little or nothing to do with the reproofs, expostulations, or threatenings, which were originally directed to the converts among those people. They console themselves with the belief that it was only the Pagans who “walked according to the course of this world”—who were “strangers from the covenants of promise”—“and who were without God in the world.”

But these self-satisfied critics would do well to learn that not only “circumcision nor uncircumcision,” but baptism or no baptism “availeth nothing” (I mean as a mere form), “but a new creature.” An irreligious professor of Christianity is as much “a stranger and foreigner,” as a heathen;

he is no more “a fellow citizen of the Saints,” and of the household of God, “than a Colossian or Galatian was, before the Christian dispensation had reached them.”

But if the persons to whom the Apostles preached had, before their conversion, no vices to which we are not liable, they had certainly difficulties afterwards from which we are happily exempt. There were indeed differences between them and us in external situations, in local circumstances, references to which we ought certainly to take into the account in perusing the Epistles. We allow that they were immediately, but we do not allow that they were exclusively, applicable to them. It would have been too limited an object for inspiration to have confined its instructions to any one period, when its purpose was the conversion and instruction of the whole unborn world. That these converts were miraculously “called out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel”—that they were changed from gross blindness to a rapid illumination—
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that the embracing the new faith exposed them to persecution, reproach and ignominy — that the few had to struggle against the world — that laws, principalities and powers which support our faith opposed theirs — these are distinctions of which we ought not to lose sight: nor should we forget that not only all the disadvantages lay on their side in their antecedent condition, but that also all the superiority lies on ours in that which is subsequent.

But however the condition of the external state of the Church might differ, there can be no necessity for any difference in the interior state of the individual Christian. On whatever high principles of devotedness to God and love to man, *they* were called to act, we are called to act on precisely the same, if their faith was called to more painful exertions, if their self-denial to harder sacrifices, if their renunciation of earthly things to severer trials, let us thankfully remember this would naturally be the case, at the first introduction of a religion which

had to combat with the pride, prejudices, and enmity of corrupt nature, invested with temporal power:—that the hostile party would not fail to perceive how much the new religion opposed itself to their corruptions, and that it was introducing a spirit which was in direct and avowed hostility to the spirit of the world.

But while we are deeply thankful for the diminished difficulties of an established faith, let us never forget that Christianity allows of no diminution in the temper, of no abatement in the spirit, which constituted a Christian in the first ages of the Church.

Christianity is precisely the same religion now as it was when our Saviour was upon earth. The spirit of the world is exactly the same now as it was then. And if the most eminent of the Apostles, under the immediate guidance of inspiration, were driven to lament their conflicts with their own corrupt nature, the power of temptation, combining with their natural propensities to evil, how can we expect that a lower faith,

faith, a slackened zeal, an abated diligence, and an inferior holiness will be accepted in *us*? Believers *then*, were not called to higher degrees of purity, to a more elevated devotion, to a deeper humility, to a greater rectitude, patience, and sincerity, than they are called to in the age in which we live. The promises are not limited to the period in which they were made, the aid of the Spirit is not confined to those on whom it was first poured out. It was expressly declared, by St. Peter on its first effusion, to be promised not only "to them and to their children, but to all who were afar off, even to as many as the Lord their God should call."

If then the same salvation be now offered as was offered at first, is it not obvious that it must be worked out in the same way? And as the same Gospel retains the same authority in all ages, so does it maintain the same universality among all ranks. Christianity has no bye-laws, no particular exemptions, no individual immunities. That there is no appropriate way of attaining

salvation for a prince or a philosopher, is probably one reason why greatness and wisdom have so often rejected it. But if rank cannot plead its privileges, genius cannot claim its distinctions. That Christianity did not owe its success to the arts of rhetoric or the sophistry of the schools, but that God intended by it “to make foolish the wisdom of this world,” actually explains why “the disputers of this world” have always been its enemies.

It would have been unworthy of the infinite God to have imparted a partial religion. There is but one “gate,” and that a “strait” one; but one “way,” and that a “narrow” one; there is but one salvation, and that a common one. The Gospel enjoins the same principles of love and obedience on all of every condition; offers the same aids under the same exigencies; the same supports under all trials; the same pardon to all penitents; the same Saviour to all believers; the same rewards to all who “endure to the end.” The temptations of

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one condition and the trials of another may call for the exercise of different qualities, for the performance of different duties, but the same personal holiness is enjoined on all. External acts of virtue may be promoted by some circumstances, and impeded by others, but the graces of inward piety are of universal force, are of eternal obligation.

The universality of its requisitions is one of its most distinguishing characteristics. In the Pagan world it seemed sufficient that a few exalted spirits, a few fine geniuses, should soar to a vast superiority above the mass; but it was never expected that the mob of Rome or Athens should aspire to any religious sentiments or feelings in common with Socrates or Epictetus. I say *religious* sentiments, because in matters of taste the distinctions were less striking, for the mob of Athens were competent critics in the dramatic art, while they were sunk in the most stupid and degrading idolatry. As to those of a higher class, while no subject in science, arts, or learning was too lofty or too abstruse

for their acquisition, no object in nature was too low, no conception of a depraved imagination was too impure for their worship. While the civil and political wisdom of the Romans was carried to such perfection that their Code of Laws has still a place in the most enlightened countries, their deplorably gross superstitions rank them in point of religion with the Savages of Africa. It shews how little a way that reason which manifested itself with such unrivalled vigour in their Poets, Orators, and Historians, as to make them still models to ours, could go in what related to religion, when these polished people in the objects of their worship are only on a par with the inhabitants of Otaheite.

It furnishes the most incontrovertible proof that the world by wisdom knew not God, that it was at the very time, and in the very country, in which knowledge and taste had attained their utmost perfection, when the Porch and the Academy had given laws to human intellect, that Atheism first assumed a shape,

a shape, and established itself into a school of Philosophy. It was at the moment when the mental powers were carried to the highest pitch in Greece, that it was settled as an infallible truth in this Philosophy that the *senses were the highest natural light of mankind.* It was in the most enlightened age of Rome that this Atheistical Philosophy was transplanted thither, and that one of her most elegant Poets adopted it, and rendered it popular by the bewitching graces of his verse.

It has been intimated with a view to depreciate Christianity by those who are offended at her humbling doctrines, that the heathen philosophers had given sufficient exaltation to the human character; that they exhibited an elevation of sentiment, and a dignity of virtue, which left nothing to desire on the side of moral excellence. This is meant to convey an oblique insinuation that the Christian revelation might have been dispensed with.

Christianity would gain no fresh honours by stripping those noble writers of their

splendid trophies. We must acknowledge that we are frequently astonished at the heights they reached. We may blush to see so much grandeur of conception, and rectitude of sentiment, where there was such an absence of illumination.

But those who give this tacit preference, do not seem to feel where the grand characteristic difference lies. The turning point which separates Christianity from all the other religions in the world escapes their observation. The dignity of the letter of Pagan virtue, and of the spirit of Christian virtue, is of a totally opposite character. The foundation is different, the views are different, the end is different. The one fills man with a perfect complacency in his own perfections : it is the object of the other to strip him of every boast. The one swells him with satisfaction at the consciousness of his own attainments ; the other teaches him never to "count himself to have attained :" a feeling of imperfection accompanies him in his best actions, and never forsakes him in

his highest advancements. The one makes the proficient in virtue rich in his own independent worth ; the other “ brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” The one glories in the victory his self-denial has obtained ; the other, after his higher conquests, exclaims, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Philosophy not seldom carried its professor to such an elevation that he rose above riches, above honours, above the world ; but it never enabled him to rise above *himself*. It never raised its votary to owe his satisfaction, his happiness, his independence, to any thing without him, or above him. He borrows nothing, he derives nothing, all is his own. Outward temptations are combated, even inward propensities are resisted, the world is degraded, but *self* is enthroned. He labours to be virtuous, and to a certain degree he obtains his object, but his virtue, that is himself, is every thing to him.

The Christian’s career is more difficult, and less dazzling. He is not only commanded

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"not to love the world nor the things of the world," he is called to a harder renunciation : he must renounce all dependence on the virtues of which he dares not neglect the performance. If the philosopher despised the world, this contempt was founded in pride, and was a homage to his own virtue. As to the Christian, "the world is crucified to him and he to the world," on a principle so abasing, that natural wisdom revolts at it ; the humbling principle of "the cross of Christ." The sage who feasted on the plenitude of his own perfections would think it a mortifying exchange to be "filled with the fulness" of any other being, though that being was "God." How would the man whose heart was overflowing with a sense of his own value endure that injunction to social kindness, "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others?" — "Let every man esteem others more than himself." would have been accounted the dictate of folly where self-estimation was the actuating principle.

Humility,

Humility, which forms the very basis of the Christian character, is so far from making a part of the code of philosophy, that it was “against the canon law of their foundation.” Not only no such quality has a place in their ethics, but it was philologically, as well as morally degraded ; the very term expressing not virtue but baseness.

As coming from the founder of a school, indeed, they might have adopted the maxim “ let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus ;” but the clause—“ who made himself of no reputation,” strips it of its value. “ This is a hard saying,” which of them could hear it ?

It seems as if the most accomplished nations stood in the most pressing need of the light of Revelation ; for it was not to the dark and stupid corners of the earth that the Apostles had their earliest missions. One of St. Paul’s first and noblest expositions of Christian Truth was made before the most august deliberative assembly in the world, though, by the way, it does not appear that
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more than one member of Areopagus was converted. In Rome some of the Apostle's earliest converts belonged to the Imperial Palace.—It was to the metropolis of cultivated Italy, it was to the polished “regions of Achaia,” to the opulent and luxurious city of Corinth, in preference to the barbarous countries of the uncivilized world, that some of his earliest Epistles were addressed.

Natural religion must have shewn man that he was a sinner, or we should not have heard of such frequent horrors of conscience, such inextinguishable remorse as is discoverable in the expressions of many heathens. It even flattered him with an intimation that the wrath of the Deity might be averted ; this accounts for their numerous altars, sacrifices, and lustrals. But these were only vague hopes, indefinite notions floating on a sea of doubt and uncertainty. They had no foundation in the divine promise ; the penitent sinner had no assurance of the divine forgiveness. The doctrine of salvation

salvation by the cross of Christ is so contrary to all human conception, that it never could have come from man ; being so incredible to natural reason, " that man," says a fine writer, " stands in need of all his submission to make it an object of his faith, though an infallible God has revealed it."

But even natural religion was little understood by those who professed it ; it was full of obscurity till viewed by the clear light of the Gospel. Not only natural religion remained to be clearly comprehended, but reason itself remained to be carried to its highest pitch in the countries where revelation is professed. Natural religion could not see itself by its own light ; reason could not extricate itself from the labyrinth of error and ignorance in which false religion had involved the world. Grace has raised nature. Revelation has given a lift to reason, and taught her to despise the follies and corruptions which obscured her brightness. If Nature is now delivered from darkness, it was
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the helping hand of Revelation which raised her from the rubbish in which she lay buried.

Christianity has not only given us right conceptions of God, of his holiness, of the way in which he will be worshipped : it has not only given us principles to promote our happiness here, and to insure it hereafter ; but it has really taught us what a proud philosophy arrogates to itself, the right use of reason. It has given us those principles of examining and judging, by which we are enabled to determine on the absurdity of false religions. “ For to what else can it be ascribed,” says the sagacious Bishop Sherlock, “ that in every Nation that names the name of Christ, even Reason and Nature see and condemn the follies, to which others are still, for want of the same help, held in subjection ? ”

Allowing, however, that Plato and Autonius seemed to have been taught of Heaven, yet the object for which we contend is, that no provision was made for the vulgar. While a faint ray shone on the page of Philosophy,

losophy, the people were involved in darkness which might be felt. The million were left to live without knowledge, and to die without hope. For what knowledge or what hope would be acquired from the preposterous, though amusing, and, in many respects, elegant Mythology, which they might pick up in their Poets, the belief of which seemed to be confined to the populace?

But there was no common principle of hope or fear, of faith or practice, no motive of consolation, no bond of charity, no communion of everlasting interests, no revolutionary equality between the wise and the ignorant, the master and the slave, the Greek and the Barbarian.

A religion was wanted which should be of general application. Christianity happily accommodated itself to the common exigence. It furnished an adequate supply to the universal want. Instead of perpetual but unexpiating sacrifices to appease imaginary deities,

Gods such as guilt makes welcome,

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it presents “one oblation, once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.” It presents one consistent scheme of morals growing out of one uniform system of doctrines; one perfect rule of practice depending on one principle of faith: it offers grace to direct the one and to assist the other. It encircles the whole sphere of duty with the broad and golden zone of coalescing charity, stamped with the beautiful inscription, “a new Commandment give I unto you, that you love one another.” Christianity, instead of destroying the distinctions of rank, or breaking in on the regulations of society, by this universal precept, furnishes new fences to its order, additional security to its repose, and fresh strength to its combinations.

The precept of doing to others as we would they should do unto us, is so clear and undeniable a duty, that the light of nature had impressed it upon many on whom the light of Revelation had never shone. A

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Roman Emperor caused it to be engraved on his plate. The first Incas of Peru taught it as one of their most indispensable rules; but it received its highest sanction and fullest confirmation from those Divine lips who stamped its importance in the Christian code by the broad declaration, *this is the law and the prophets*: thus establishing a legitimate and regulated self-love as the standard of our social conduct; as both the rule of charity, and the law of equity. How lamentably do men depart from this obvious and intelligible principle when they vindicate their unkindness or their injustice by making what others *actually* do to them, their own measure of retribution, instead of what they *would* that others should do!

Were this universal requisition uniformly observed, the whole frame of society would be cemented and consolidated into one indissoluble bond of universal brotherhood. This divinely enacted law is the final principle of justice, charity, patience, forbearance, in short, of all social virtue. That it

it does not produce these excellent effects, is not owing to any defect in the principle, but in our corrupt nature, which so reluctantly, so imperfectly obeys it. If it were conscientiously adopted, and substantially acted upon, received in its very spirit, and obeyed from the ground of the heart, human laws might be abrogated, Courts of Justice abolished, and Treatises of Morality burnt ; war would be no longer an Art, nor military Tactics a Science. We should suffer long and be kind, and so far from " seeking that which is another's," we should not even " seek our own."

But let not the Soldier or the Lawyer be alarmed. Their craft is in no danger. The world does not intend to act upon the Divine principle which would injure their professions ; and till this only revolution which good men desire, actually takes place, our fortunes will not be secure without the exertions of the one, nor our lives without the protection of the other.

All the virtues have their appropriate place and rank in Scripture. They are introduced as individually beautiful, and as reciprocally connected, like the graces in the Mythologic dance. But perhaps no Christian grace ever sat to the hand of a more consummate master than Charity. Her incomparable painter, Saint Paul, has drawn her at full length, in all her fair proportions. Every attitude is full of grace, every lineament, of beauty. The whole delineation is perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Who can look at this finished piece without blushing at his own want of likeness to it? Yet if this conscious dissimilitude induce a cordial desire of resemblance, the humiliation will be salutary. Perhaps a more frequent contemplation of this exquisite figure, accompanied with earnest endeavours for a growing resemblance, would gradually lead us, not barely to admire the Portrait, but would at length assimilate us to the Divine Original.

CHAP. X.

Christian Holiness.

CHRISTIANITY then, as we have attempted to shew in the preceding Chapter, exhibits no different standards of goodness applicable to different stations or characters. No one can be allowed to rest in a low degree and plead his exemption for aiming no higher. No one can be secure in any state of piety below that slate which would not have been enjoined on all, had not all been entitled to the means of attaining it.

Those who keep their pattern in their eye, though they may fail of the highest attainments, will not be satisfied with such as are low. The striking inferiority will excite compunction; compunction will stimulate them to press on, which those never do, who, losing sight of their standard, are satisfied with the height they have reached.

He is not likely to be the object of God's favour, who takes his determined stand on the very lowest step in the scale of perfection; who does not even aspire above it, whose aim seems to be, not so much to please God as to escape punishment. Many however will doubtless be accepted though their progress has been small; their difficulties may have been great, their natural capacity weak, their temptations strong, and their instruction defective.

Revelation has not only furnished injunctions but motives to holiness; not only motives, but examples and authorities. "Be ye therefore perfect" (according to your measure and degree) "as your father which is in heaven is perfect." And, what says the Old Testament? It accords with the New—"Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

This was the injunction of God himself, not given exclusively to Moses, to the leader and legislator, or to a few distinguished officers, or to a selection of eminent men, but

to an immense body of people; even to the whole assembled host of Israel: to men of all ranks, professions, capacities, and characters, to the Minister of religion, and to the uninstructed, to enlightened rulers, and to feeble women. “God,” says an excellent writer *, “had antecedently given to his people particular laws suited to their several exigencies, and various conditions, but the command to be holy was a general (might he not have said a universal) law.”

“Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” This is perhaps the sublimest apostrophe of praise, rendered more striking by its interrogatory form, which the Scriptures have recorded. It makes a part of the first song of gratulation which is to be found in the treasury of sacred Poetry. This epithet of *holy* is more frequently affixed to the name of God than any other. His *mighty* name

* Saurin.

is less often invoked, than his *holy name*. To offend against this attribute is represented as more heinous than to oppose any other. It has been remarked that the impiety of the Assyrian Monarch is not described by his hostility against the great, the Almighty God, but it is made an aggravation of his crime that he had committed it against *the Holy one of Israel*.

When God condescended to give a pledge for the performance of his promise, he swears by his *holiness*, as if it were the distinguishing quality which was more especially binding. It seems connected and interwoven with all the divine perfections. Which of his excellencies can we contemplate as separated from this? Is not his justice stamped with sanctity? It is free from any tincture of vindictiveness, and is therefore a holy justice. His mercy has none of the partiality, or favouritism, or capricious fondness of human kindness, but is a holy mercy. His holiness is not more the source of his mercies than of his punishments. If his

holiness in his severities to us wanted a justification, there cannot be at once a more substantial and more splendid illustration of it than the noble passage already quoted, for he is called “glorious in holiness” immediately after he had vindicated the honour of his name, by the miraculous destruction of the army of Pharaoh.

Is it not then a necessary consequence growing out of his own perfections, that “a righteous God loveth righteousness,” that he will of course require in his creatures a desire to imitate as well as to adore that attribute by which He himself loves to be distinguished? We cannot indeed, like God, be essentially holy. In an infinite being it is a substance, in a created being it is only an accident. God is the essence of holiness, but we can have no holiness, nor any other good thing, but what we derive from him.—It is his prerogative, but our privilege.

If God loves holiness because it is his image, he must consequently hate sin because it defaces his image. If he glorifies his

his own mercy and goodness in rewarding virtue, he no less vindicates the honour of his holiness in the punishment of vice.—A perfect God can no more approve of sin in his creatures than he can commit it himself. He may forgive sin on his own conditions, but there are no conditions on which he can be reconciled to it. The infinite goodness of God may delight in the beneficial purposes to which his infinite wisdom has made the sins of his creatures subservient, but sin itself will always be abhorrent to his nature. His wisdom may turn it to a merciful end, but his indignation at the offence cannot be diminished. He loves man, for he cannot but love his own work; He hates sin, for that was man's own invention, and no part of the work which God had made. Even in the imperfect administration of human laws, impunity of crimes would be construed into approbation of them*.

* Note—See Charnok on the Attributes.

The law of holiness, then, is a law binding on all persons without distinction, not limited to the period nor to the people to whom it was given. It reaches through the whole Jewish dispensation, and extends, with wider demands and higher sanctions, to every Christian, of every denomination, of every age, and every country.

A more sublime motive cannot be assigned why we should be holy than because "the Lord our God is holy." Men of the world have no objection to the terms virtue, morality, integrity, rectitude, but they associate something overacted, not to say hypocritical, with the term holiness, and neither use it in a good sense when applied to others, nor would wish to have it applied to themselves, but make it over, with a little suspicion, and not a little derision, to puritans and enthusiasts.

This suspected epithet however is surely rescued from every injurious association, if we consider it as the chosen attribute of the Most High. We do not presume to apply
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the terms virtue, probity, morality, to God, but we ascribe holiness to him because he first ascribed it to himself, as the aggregate and consummation of all his perfections.

Shall so imperfect a being as Man, then, ridicule the application of this term to others, or be ashamed of it himself? There is a cause indeed which should make him ashamed of the appropriation, that of not deserving it. This comprehensive appellation includes all the Christian graces, all the virtues in their just proportion, order, and harmony; in all their bearings, relations, and dependencies. And as in God, glory and holiness are united, so the Apostle combines "sanctification and honour" as the glory of Man.

Traces more or less of the holiness of God may be found in his works, to those who view them with the eye of faith: they are more plainly visible in his Providences; but it is in his word that we must chiefly look for the manifestations of his holiness. He is every where described as perfectly holy in himself, as a model to be imitated by his

creatures, and though with an interval immeasurable, as imitable by them.

The great doctrine of Redemption is inseparably connected with the doctrine of Sanctification. As an admirable writer has observed, “ if the blood of Christ reconcile us to the justice of God, the spirit of Christ is to reconcile us to the holiness of God.” When we are told therefore that Christ is made unto us “ righteousness,” we are in the same place taught that he is made unto us “ sanctification ;” that is, he is both justifier and sanctifier. In vain shall we deceive ourselves by resting on his sacrifice, while we neglect to imitate his example.

The glorious Spirits which surround the throne of God are not represented as singing hallelujahs to his omnipotence, nor even to his mercy, but to that attribute which as with a glory encircles all the rest. They perpetually cry, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts ; and it is observable, that the Angels which adore him for his holiness are the ministers of his justice. Those

pure

pure intelligences perceive, no doubt, that this union of attributes constitutes the divine perfection.

This infinitely blessed being, then, to whom angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven are continually ascribing holiness, has commanded us to be holy. To be holy because God is holy, is both an argument and a command. An argument founded on the perfections of God, and a command to imitate him. This command is given to creatures fallen indeed, but to whom God graciously promises strength for the imitation. If we do not endeavour to imitate him whom we worship, we do not worship him in sincerity. It is obvious that we see little of the infinite excellences of that being to some faint resemblance of which we do not endeavour to aspire. If in God holiness implies an aggregate of perfections; in man, even in his low degree, it is an incorporation of the Christian graces.

The holiness of God indeed is confined by no limitation; ours is bounded, finite,

imperfect. Yet let us be sedulous to extend our little sphere. Let our desires be large, though our capacities are contracted. Let our aims be lofty, though our attainments are low. Let us be solicitous that no day pass without some augmentation of our holiness, some added height in our aspirations, some wider expansion in the compass of our virtues. Let us strive every day for some superiority to the preceding day, something that shall distinctly mark the passing scene with progress; something that shall inspire an humble hope that we are rather less unfit for heaven to-day, than we were yesterday. The celebrated artist who has recorded that he passed no day without drawing a line, drew it not for repetition but for progress; not to produce a given number of strokes, but to forward his work, to complete his design. The Christian, like the painter, does not draw his line at random, he has a model to imitate, as well as an outline to fill. Every touch conforms him more and more to the great original. He who has trans-

fused most of the life of God into his soul, has copied it most successfully.

"To seek happiness," says one of the Fathers, "is to desire God, and to find him is that happiness." Our very happiness therefore is not our independent property : it flows from that eternal mind which is the source and sum of happiness. In vain we look for felicity in all around us. It can only be found in that original fountain, whence we, and all we are and have, are derived. Where then is the imaginary wise man of the school of Zeno? What is the perfection of virtue supposed by Aristotle? They have no existence but in the Romance of Philosophy. Happiness must be imperfect in an imperfect state. Religion, it is true, is initial happiness, and points to its perfection : but as the best men possess it but imperfectly, they cannot be perfectly happy. Nothing can confer completeness which is itself incomplete. "With Thee, O Lord, is the fountain of life, and in Thy light only we shall see light *."

* See Leighton on Happiness.

Whatever shall still remain wanting in our attainments, and much will still remain, let this last, greatest, highest consideration stimulate our languid exertions, that God has negatively promised the beatific vision, the enjoyment of his presence, to this attainment, by specifically proclaiming that without holiness no man shall see his face. To know God is the rudiments of that eternal life which will hereafter be perfected by seeing him:—As there is no stronger reason why we must not look for perfect happiness in this life than because there is no perfect holiness, so the nearer advances we make to the one, the greater progress we shall make towards the other; we must cultivate here those tendencies and tempers which must be carried to perfection in a happier clime. But as holiness is the concomitant of happiness, so must it be its precursor. As sin has destroyed our happiness, so sin must be destroyed before our happiness can be restored. Our nature must be renovated before our felicity can be established. This is according to

to the nature of things as well as agreeable to the law and will of God. Let us then carefully look to the subduing in our inmost hearts all those dispositions that are unlike God, all those actions, thoughts and tendencies that are contrary to God.

Independently therefore of all the other motives to holiness which religion suggests; independently of the fear of punishment, independently even of the hope of glory, let us be holy from this ennobling, elevating motive, because the Lord our God is holy. And when our virtue flags, let it be renovated by this imperative injunction, backed by this irresistible argument. The motive for imitation, and the Being to be imitated, seem almost to identify us with infinity. It is a connection which endears, an assimilation which dignifies, a resemblance which elevates. The Apostle has added to the prophet an assurance which makes the fulness and consummation of the promise; "that though we know not yet what we shall be, yet we know that when he shall appear, we shall

shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

In what a beautiful variety of glowing expressions, and admiring strains, do the Scripture worthies delight to represent God; not only in relation to what he is to them, but to the supreme excellence of his own transcendent perfections! They expatiate, they amplify, they dwell with unwearied iteration on the adorable theme; they ran-fleck language, they exhaust all the expressions of praise and wonder and admiration, all the images of astonishment; they delight to laud and magnify his glorious name. They praise him, they bless him, they worship him, they glorify him, they give thanks to him for his great glory, saying, "Holy holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory."

They glorify him relatively to themselves.—"I will magnify Thee, O Lord my strength—My help cometh of God—The Lord ~~Himself~~ is the portion of my inheritance."

ance.” At another time, soaring with a noble disinterestedness, and quite losing sight of self and all created glories, they adore him for his own incommunicable excellences.

“ Be thou exalted, O God, in thine own strength.”—“ Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

Then bursting into a rapture of adoration, and burning with a more intense flame, they cluster his attributes—“ To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be honour and glory for ever and ever.” One is lost in admiration of his wisdom—his ascription is “ to the only wise God.” Another in triumphant strains overflows with transport at the consideration of the attribute on which we have been descanting—“ O Lord, who is like unto Thee, there is none holy as the Lord.” “ Sing praises unto the Lord, oh ye saints of his, and give thanks unto him for a remembrance of his holiness.”

The Prophets and Apostles were not deterred from pouring out the overflowings of their fervent spirits, they were not restrained
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from celebrating the perfections of their Creator, through the cold-hearted fear of being reckoned Enthusiasts. The saints of old were not prevented from breathing out their rapturous hosannas to the King of saints, through the coward dread of being branded as fanatical. The conceptions of their minds dilating with the view of the glorious constellation of the divine attributes; and the affections of their hearts warming with the thoughts that those attributes were all concentrated in Mercy,—they display a sublime oblivion of themselves,—they forget every thing but God. Their own wants dwindle to a point. Their own concerns, nay the Universe itself, shrink into nothing. They seem absorbed in the effulgence of deity, lost in the radiant beams of infinite glory.

CHAP XI.

On the comparatively small Faults and Virtues.

THE “Fishers of Men,” as if exclusively bent on catching the greater sinners, often make the interstices of the moral net so wide, that it cannot retain those of more ordinary size, which everywhere abound. Their draught might be more abundant, were not the meshes so large that the smaller sort, aided by their own lubricity, escape the toils and slip through. Happy to find themselves not bulky enough to be entangled, they plunge back again into their native element, enjoy their escape, and hope they may safely wait to grow bigger before they are in danger of being caught.

It is of more importance than we are aware, or are willing to allow, that we take care diligently to practise the smaller virtues, avoid scrupulously the lesser sins, and bear patiently inferior trials; for the sin of habitually

tually yielding, or the grace of habitually resisting, in comparatively small points, tends in no inconsiderable degree to produce that vigour or that debility of mind, on which hangs victory or defeat.

Conscience is moral sensation. It is the hasty perception of good and evil, the peremptory decision of the mind to adopt the one or avoid the other. Providence has furnished the body with senses, and the soul with conscience, as a *tacit* by which to shrink from the approach of danger; as a prompt feeling to supply the deductions of reasoning; as a spontaneous impulse to precede a train of reflections for which the suddenness and surprise of the attack allow no time. An enlightened conscience, if kept tenderly alive by a continual attention to its admonitions, would especially preserve us from those smaller sins, and stimulate us to those lesser duties which we are falsely apt to think are too insignificant to be brought to the bar of religion, too trivial to be weighed by the standard of Scripture.

By

By cherishing this quick feeling of rectitude, light and sudden as the flash from heaven, and which is in fact the motion of the spirit, we intuitively reject what is wrong before we have time to examine why it is wrong ; and seize on what is right before we have time to examine why it is right. Should we not then be careful how we extinguish this sacred spark ? Will any thing be more likely to extinguish it than to neglect its hourly mementos to perform the smaller duties, and to avoid the lesser faults which, as they in a good measure make up the sum of human life, will naturally fix and determine our character, that creature of habits ? Will not our neglect or observance of it, incline or indispose us for those more important duties of which these smaller ones are connecting links.

The vices derive their existence from wildness, confusion, disorganization. The discord of the passions is owing to their having different views, conflicting aims, and opposite ends. The rebellious vices have no common

common head ; each is all to itself. They promote their own operations by disturbing those of others, but in disturbing they do not destroy them. Though they are all of one family they live on no friendly terms. Profligacy hates covetousness as much as if it were a virtue. The life of every sin is a life of conflict which occasions the torment, but not the death of its opposite. Like the fabled brood of the serpent, the passions spring up, armed against each other, but they fail to complete the resemblance, for they do not effect their mutual destruction.

But without union the Christian graces could not be perfected, and the smaller virtues are the threads and filaments which gently but firmly tie them together. There is an attractive power in goodness which draws each part to the other. This concord of the virtues is derived from their having one common centre in which all meet. In vice there is a strong repulsion. Though bad men seek each other, they do not love each other. Each seeks the other in order
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to promote his own purposes, while he hates him by whom his purposes are promoted.

The lesser qualities of the human character are like the lower people in a country; they are numerically, if not individually, important. If well regulated they become valuable from that very circumstance of numbers which, under a negligent administration, renders them formidable. The peace of the individual mind and of the nation, is materially affected by the discipline in which these inferior orders are maintained. Laxity and neglect in both cases are subversive of all good government.

But if we may be allowed "to glance from earth to heaven," perhaps the beauty of the lesser virtues may be still better illustrated by that long and luminous track made up of minute & almost imperceptible stars, which though separately too inconsiderable to attract attention, yet from their number and their confluence, form that soft and shining stream of light every where discernible, and which always corresponds to
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the same fixed stars, as the smaller virtues do to their concomitant great ones.—Without pursuing the metaphor to the classic fiction that the Galaxy was the road through which the ancient heroes went to heaven, may we not venture to say that Christians will make their way thither more pleasant by the consistent practice of the minuter virtues?

Every Christian should consider Religion as a fort which he is called to defend. The meanest soldier in the army, if he add patriotism to valour, will fight as earnestly as if the glory of the contest depended on his single arm. But he brings his watchfulness as well as his courage into action. He strenuously defends every pass he is appointed to guard, without enquiring whether it be great or small. There is not any defect in religion or morals so little as to be of no consequence. Work~~ee~~ things may be little because their aim and end may be little. Things are great or small; not according to their ostensible importance, but according to the magnitude of their object, and the importance of their consequences.

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The acquisition of even the smallest virtue being, as has been before observed, an actual conquest over the opposite vice, doubles our moral strength. The spiritual enemy has one subject less, and the conqueror one virtue more.

By allowed negligence in small things, we are not aware how much we injure religion in the eye of the world. How can we expect people to believe that we are in earnest in great points, when they see that we cannot withstand a trivial temptation, against which resistance would have been comparatively easy? At a distance they hear with respect of our general characters. They become domesticated with us, and discover the same failings, littlenesses and bad tempers, as they have been accustomed to meet with in the most ordinary persons.

If Milton in one of his letters to a learned foreigner who had visited him, could congratulate himself on the consciousness that in that visit he had been found equal to his reputation, and had supported in private conversation

conversation his high character as an author ; shall not the Christian be equally anxious to support the credit of his holy profession, by not betraying in familiar life any temper inconsistent with religion ?

It is not difficult to attract respect on great occasions, where we are kept in order by knowing that the public eye is fixed upon us. It is easy to maintain a regard to our dignity in a “*Symposiac*, or an academical dinner ;” but to labour to maintain it in the recesses of domestic privacy requires more watchfulness, and is no less the duty, than it will be the habitual practice, of the consistent Christian.

Our neglect of inferior duties is particularly injurious to the minds of our dependants and servants. If they see us “weak and infirm of purpose,” peevish, irresolute, capricious, passionate, or inconsistent, in our daily conduct, which comes under their immediate observation, and which comes also within their power of judging, they will not give us credit for those higher qualities
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which we may possess, and those superior duties which we may be more careful to fulfil. Neither their capacity nor their opportunities, may enable them to judge of the orthodoxy of the head ; but there will be obvious and decisive proofs to the meanest capacity, of the state and temper of the heart. Our greater qualities will do them little good, while our lesser but incessant faults do them much injury. Seeing us so defective in the daily course of domestic conduct, though they will obey us because they are obliged to it, they will neither love nor esteem us enough to be influenced by our advice, nor to be governed by our instructions, on those great points which every conscientious head of a family will be careful to inculcate on all about him. It demands no less circumspection to be a *Christian*, than to be “ a *hero*, to one’s valet de chambre.”

In all that relates to God and to himself, the Christian knows of no small faults. He considers all allowed and wilful sins, whatever be their magnitude, as an offence

against his Maker. Nothing that offends *him* can be insignificant. Nothing that contributes to fasten on ourselves a wrong habit can be trifling. Faults which we are accustomed to consider as small, are repeated without compunction. The habit of committing them is confirmed by the repetition. Frequency renders us at first indifferent, then insensible. The hopelessness attending a long indulged custom generates carelessness, till for want of exercise the power of resistance is first weakened, then destroyed.

But there is a still more serious point of view in which the subject may be considered. Do small faults continually repeated, always retain their original diminutiveness? Is any axiom more established than that all evil is of a progressive nature? Is a bad temper which is never repressed, no worse after years of indulgence, than when we first gave the reins to it? Does that which we first allowed ourselves under the name of harmless levity on serious subjects, never proceed to profaneness? Does what was once admired as
proper

proper spirit, never grow into pride, never fwell into insolence? Does the habit of incorrect narrative, or loose talking, or allowed hyperbole, never lead to falsehood, never settle in deceit? Before we positively determine that small faults are innocent, we must undertake to prove that they shall never outgrow their primitive dimensions; we must ascertain that the infant shall never become a giant.

Procrastination is reckoned among the most venial of our faults, and sits so lightly on our minds, that we scarcely apologize for it. But who can assure us that had not the assistance we had resolved to give to one friend under distress, or the advice to another under temptation to-day, being delayed, and from mere sloth and indolence been put off till to-morrow, it might not have preserved the fortunes of the one, or saved the soul of the other?

It is not enough that we perform duties, we must perform them at the right time. We must do the duty of every day in its own

season. Every day has its own imperious duties ; we must not depend upon to-day for fulfilling those which we neglected yesterday, for to-day might not have been granted us. To-morrow will be equally peremptory in its demands ; and the succeeding day, if we live to see it, will be ready with its proper claims.

Indecision, though it is not so often caused by reflection as by the want of it, yet may be as mischievous, for if we spend too much time in balancing probabilities, the period for action is lost. While we are ruminating on difficulties which may never occur, reconciling differences which perhaps do not exist, and poising in opposite scales things of nearly the same weight, the opportunity is lost of producing that good, which a firm and manly decision would have effected.

Idleness, though itself “ the most unperforming of all the vices,” is however the pass through which they all enter, the stage on which they all act. Though supremely passive itself, it lends a willing hand to all evil,

evil, practical as well as speculative. It is the abettor of every sin whoever commits it, the receiver of all booty whoever is the thief. If it does nothing itself, it connives at all the mischief that is done by others.

Vanity is exceedingly misplaced when ranked, as she commonly is, in the catalogue of small faults. It is under her character of harmlessness that she does all her mischief. She is indeed often found in the society of great virtues. She does not follow in the train, but mixes herself with the company, and by mixing mars it. The use our spiritual enemy makes of her is a master stroke. When he cannot prevent us from doing right actions, he can accomplish his purpose almost as well "by making us vain of them." When he cannot deprive the public of our benevolence, he can defeat the effect to ourselves by poisoning the principle. When he cannot rob others of the good effect of the deed, he can gain his point by robbing the doer of his reward.

Peevishness is another of the minor miseries. Human life, though sufficiently unhappy, cannot contrive to furnish misfortunes so often as the passionate and the peevish can supply impatience. To commit our reason and temper to the mercy of every acquaintance, and of every servant, is not making the wisest use of them. If we recollect that violence and peevishness are the common resource of those whose knowledge is small, and whose arguments are weak, our very pride might lead us to subdue our passion, if we had not a better principle to resort to. Anger is the common refuge of insignificance. People who feel their character to be slight, hope to give it weight by inflation. But the blown bladder at its fullest distension is still empty. Sluggish characters, above all, have no right to be passionate. They should be contented with their own congenial faults. Dulness however has its impetuositieS and its fluctuations as well as genius. It is on the coast of heavy Boeotia that the Euripus exhibits

exhibits its unparalleled restlessness and agitation.

Trifling is ranked among the venial faults. But if time be one grand talent given us in order to our securing eternal life; if we trifle away that time so as to lose that eternal life, on which by not trifling we might have laid hold, then will it answer the end of sin. A life devoted to trifles not only takes away the inclination, but the capacity for higher pursuits. The truths of Christianity have scarcely more influence on a frivolous than on a profligate character. If the mind be so absorbed, not merely with what is vicious, but with what is useless, as to be thoroughly disinclined to the activities of a life of piety, it matters little what the cause is which so disinclines it. If these habits cannot be accused of great moral evil, yet it argues a low state of mind, that a being who has an eternity at stake can abandon itself to trivial pursuits. If the great concern of life cannot be secured without habitual watchfulness, how is it to be secured by habitual carelessness? It

will afford little comfort to the trifler, when at the last reckoning he gives in his long negative catalogue that the more ostensible offender was worse employed. The trifler will not be weighed in the scale with the profligate, but in the balance of the sanctuary.

Some men make for themselves a sort of code of the lesser morals, of which they settle both the laws and the chronology. They fix "the clima&tericks of the mind *;" determine at what period such a vice may be adopted without discredit, at what age one bad habit may give way to another more in character. Having settled it as a matter of course, that to a certain age certain faults are natural, they proceed to act as if they thought them necessary.

But let us not practice on ourselves the gross imposition to believe that any failing, much less any vice, is necessarily appended to any state or any age, or that it is irreducible as any. We may accustom our-

* Dr. Johnson.

selves to talk of vanity and extravagance as belonging to the young, and avarice and peevishness to the old, till the next step will be that we shall think ourselves justified in adopting them. Whoever is eager to find excuses for vice and folly, will feel his own backwardness to practise them much diminished. It is only to make out an imaginary necessity, and then we easily fall into the necessity we have imagined. Providence has established no such association. There is, it is true, more danger of certain faults under certain circumstances ; and some temptations are stronger at some periods, but it is a proof that they are not irresistible because *all* do not fall into them. The evil is in ourselves, who mitigate the discredit by the supposed necessity. The prediction, like the dream of the Astrologer, creates the event instead of foretelling it. But there is no supposition can be made of a bad case which will justify the making it our own : Nor will general positions ever serve for individual apologies.—Who has not known

persons who, though they retain the sound health and vigour of active life, sink prematurely into sloth and inactivity, solely on the ground that these dispositions are fancied to be unavoidably incident to advancing years? They demand the indulgence before they feel the infirmity. Indolence thus forges a dismission from duty before the discharge is issued out by Providence. No.—Let us endeavour to meet the evils of the several conditions and periods of life with submission, but it is an offence to their Divine dispenser to forestal them.

But we have still a saving clause for ourselves, whether the evil be of a greater or lesser magnitude. If the fault be great we lament the inability to resist it, if small, we deny the importance of so doing; we plead that we cannot withstand a great temptation, and that a small one is not worth withstanding. But if the temptation or the fault be great, we should resist it on account of that very magnitude; if small, the giving it up can cost but little; and the conscientious habit
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of conquering the less will confer considerable strength towards subduing the greater.

There is again a sort of splendid character, which winding itself up occasionally to certain shining actions, thinks itself fully justified in breaking loose from the shackles of restraint in smaller things ; it makes no scruple to indemnify itself for these popular deeds by indulgences which, though allowed, are far from innocent. It thus secures to itself praise and popularity by what is sure to gain it, and immunity from censure in indulging the favourite fault, practically exclaiming, “ is it not a little one ?”

Vanity is at the bottom of almost all, may we not say, of all our sins ? We think more of signalizing than of saving ourselves. We overlook the hourly occasions which occur of serving, of obliging, of comforting those around us, while we sometimes not unwillingly perform an act of notorious generosity. The habit however in the former case better indicates the disposition and bent of the

mind, than the solitary act of splendor. The Apostle does not say whatsoever *great* things ye do, but “whatsoever things ye do, do *all* to the glory of God.” Actions are less weighed by their bulk than their motive. Virtues are less measured by their splendor than their principle. The racer proceeds in his course more effectually by a steady unslackened pace, than by starts of violent but unequal exertion.

That great abstract of moral law, of which we have elsewhere spoken *, that rule of the highest court of appeal, set up in his own bosom, to which every man can always resort, “all things that ye would that men should do unto you do ye also unto them.”—This law if faithfully obeyed, operating as an infallible remedy for all the disorders of society, would, by throwing its partiality into the right scale, establish the exercise of all the smaller virtues. Its strict observance wouⁿt not only put a stop to all

* Chap. IX

injustice

injustice but to all unkindness ; not only to oppressive acts, but to unfeeling language. Even haughty looks and supercilious gestures would be banished from the face of society, did we ask ourselves how we should like to receive what we are not ashamed to give. Till we thus morally transmute place, person, and circumstance with those of our brother, we shall never treat him with the tenderness this gracious law enjoins.

Small virtues and small offences are only so by comparison. To treat a fellow-creature with harsh language, is not indeed a crime like robbing him of his estate or destroying his reputation. They are however all the offspring of the same family. They are the same in quality though not in degree. All flow, though in streams of different magnitude, from the same fountain ; all are indications of a departure from that principle which is included in the law of love. The consequences they involve are not less certain, though they are less important.

The

The reason why what are called religious people often differ so little from others in small trials is, that instead of bringing religion to their aid in their lesser vexations, they either leave the disturbance to prey upon their minds, or apply to false reliefs for its removal. Those who are rendered unhappy by frivolous troubles, seek comfort in frivolous enjoyments. But we should apply the same remedy to ordinary trials as to great ones ; for as small disquietudes spring from the same cause as great trials, namely, the uncertain and imperfect condition of human life, so they require the same remedy. Meeting common cares with a right spirit would impart a smoothness to the temper, a spirit of cheerfulness to the heart, which would mightily break the force of heavier trials.

You apply to the power of religion in great evils. Why does it not occur to you to apply to it in the less? Is it that you think the instrument greater than the occasion demands?

demands? It is not too great if the lesser one will not produce the effect; or if it produce it in the wrong way, for there is such a thing as putting an evil out of sight without curing it. You would apply to religion on the loss of your child — apply to it on the loss of your temper. Throw in this wholesome tree to sweeten the bitter waters. As no calamity is too great for the power of Christianity to mitigate, so none is too small to experience its beneficial results. Our behaviour under the ordinary accidents of life forms a characteristic distinction between different classes of Christians. The least advanced resort to Religion on great occasions, the deeper proficient resorts to it on all. What makes it appear of so little comparative value is, that the medicine prepared by the great Physician is thrown by instead of being taken. The patient thinks not of it but in extreme cases. A remedy however potent, not applied, can produce no effect. But he who has adopted one fixed principle for the government of his life,

life, will try to keep it in perpetual exercise. An acquaintance with the nature of human evils and of their remedy, would check that spirit of complaint which so much abounds, and which often makes so little difference between people professing religion and those who profess it not.

If the duties in question are not great, they become important by the constant demand that is made for them. They have been called "the small coin of human life," and on their perpetual and unobstructed circulation depends much of the comfort as well as convenience of its transactions. They make up in frequency what they want in magnitude. How few of us are called to carry the doctrines of Christianity into distant lands ! but which of us is not called every day to adorn those doctrines, by gentleness in our own carriage, by kindness and forbearance to all about us ?

In performing the unostensible duties there is no incentive from vanity. No love of fame inspires that virtue of which fame will

will never hear. There can be but one motive, and that the purest, for the exercise of virtues, the report of which will never reach beyond the little circle whose happiness they promote. They do not fill the world with our renown, but they fill our own family with comfort, and if they have the love of God for their principle, they will have his favour for their reward.

In this enumeration of faults, we include not sins of infirmity, inadvertency, and surprize, to which even the most sincere Christians are but too liable. What are here adverted to are allowed, habitual, and unresisted faults : habitual because unresisted, and allowed from the notion that they are too inconsiderable to call for resistance. Faults into which we are betrayed through surprize and inadvertency, though that is no reason for committing them, may not be without their uses ; they renew the salutary conviction of our sinful nature, make us little in our own eyes, increase our sense of dependence, promote watchfulness,

ness, deepen humility, and quicken repentance.

We must however be careful not to entangle the conscience or embarrass the spirit by groundless apprehensions. We have a merciful father, not a hard master to deal with. We must not harass our minds with a suspicious dread as if by a needless rigour the Almighty were laying snares to entrap us, nor be terrified with imaginary fears as if he were on the watch to punish every casual error.—To be immutable and impeccable belongs not to humanity. He who made us best knows of what we are made.—Our compassionate High Priest will bear with much infirmity, will pardon much involuntary weakness.

But knowing, as every man must know who looks into his own heart, the difficulties he has from the intervention of his evil tempers, in serving God faithfully, and still however earnestly desirous to serve him, is it not to be lamented that he is not more solicitous to remove his hindrances by trying
to

to avoid those inferior sins, and resisting those lesser temptations, and practising those smaller virtues, the neglect of which obstructs his way, and keeps him back in the performance of higher duties. Instead of little renunciations being grievous, and petty self-denials a hardship, they in reality soften grievances, diminish hardship. They are the private drill which trains for public service.

If, as we have repeatedly remarked, the principle is the test of the action, we are hourly furnished with occasions of shewing our piety by the spirit in which the quiet unnoticed actions of life are performed. The sacrifices may be too little to be observed except by him to whom they are offered. But small solicitudes, and demonstrations of attachment, scarcely perceptible to any eye but his for whom they are made, bear the true character of love to God, as they are the infallible marks of affection to our fellow-creatures.

By

By enjoining small duties, the spirit of which is every where implied in the Gospel, God, as it were, seems contriving to render the great ones easy to us. He makes the light yoke of Christ still lighter, not by abridging duty, but by increasing its facility through its familiarity. These little habits at once indicate the sentiment of the soul and improve it.

It is an awful consideration, and one which every Christian should bring home to his own bosom, whether small faults wilfully persisted in, may not in time not only dim the light of conscience, but extinguish the spirit of grace: Whether the power of resistance against great sins may not be finally withdrawn as a just punishment for having neglected to exert it against small ones.

Let us endeavour to maintain in our minds the awful impression that perhaps among the first objects which may meet our eyes when we open them on the eternal world,

world, may be that tremendous book, in which, together with our great and actual sins, may be recorded in no less prominent characters, the ample page of omissions, of neglected opportunities, and even of fruitless good intentions, of which indolence, indecision, thoughtlessness, vanity, trifling and procrastination, concurred to frustrate the execution.

CHAP. XII.

Self-Examination.

IN this age of general enquiry, every kind of ignorance is esteemed dishonourable. In almost every sort of knowledge there is a competition for superiority. Intellectual attainments are never to be undervalued. Learning is the best human thing. All knowledge is excellent as far as it goes, and as long as it lasts. But how short is the period before “tongues shall cease and knowledge shall vanish away.”

Shall we then esteem it dishonourable to be ignorant in any thing which relates to life and literature, to taste and science, and not feel ashamed to live in ignorance of our own hearts?

To have a flourishing estate and a mind in disorder; to keep exact accounts with a

Steward, and no reckoning with our Maker; to have an accurate knowledge of loss or gain in our business, and to remain utterly ignorant whether our spiritual concerns are improving or declining; to be cautious in ascertaining at the end of every year how much we have increased or diminished our fortune, and to be careless whether we have incurred profit or loss in faith and holiness, is making a wretched estimate of the comparative value of things. To bestow our attention on objects in direct opposition to their importance, is surely no proof that our learning has improved our judgment.

That deep thinker and acute reasoner, Dr. Barrow, has remarked, that "it is a peculiar excellency of human nature, and which distinguishes man from the inferior creatures more than bare reason itself, that he can reflect upon all that is done within him, can discern the tendencies of his soul, and is acquainted with his own purposes."

This

This distinguishing faculty of self-inspection would not have been conferred on man, if it had not been intended that it should be in habitual operation. It is surely, as we before observed, as much a common law of prudence to look well to our spiritual as to our worldly possessions. We have appetites to controul, imaginations to restrain, tempers to regulate, passions to subdue; and how can this internal work be effected, how can our thoughts be kept within due bounds, how can a proper bias be given to the affections, how can "the little state of man" be preserved from continual insurrection, how can this restraining power be maintained, if this capacity of discerning, if this faculty of inspecting be not kept in regular exercise? Without constant discipline, imagination will become an outlaw, conscience an attainted rebel.

This inward eye, this power of introversion is given us for a continual watch upon the soul. On an unremitting vigilance over its interior motions, those fruitful seeds of action,

action, those prolific principles of vice and virtue will depend both the formation and the growth of our moral and religious character. A superficial glance is not enough for a thing so deep, an unsteady view will not suffice for a thing so wavering, nor a casual look for a thing so deceitful as the human heart. A partial inspection on any one side, will not be enough for an object which must be observed under a variety of aspects, because it is always shifting its position, always changing its appearances.

We should examine not only our conduct but our opinions; not only our faults but our prejudices, not only our propensities but our judgments. Our actions themselves will be obvious enough; it is our intentions which require the scrutiny. These we should follow up to their remotest springs, scrutinize to their deepest recesses, trace through their most perplexing windings. And lest we should, in our pursuit, wander in uncertainty and blindness, let us make use of that guiding clue which the Almighty has

furnished by his word, and by his spirit, for conducting us through the intricacies of this labyrinth. "What I know not teach Thou me," should be our constant petition in all our researches.

Did we turn our thoughts inward, it would abate much of the self-complacency with which we swallow the flattery of others. Flattery hurts not him who flatters not himself. If we examined our motives keenly, we should frequently blush at the praises our actions receive. Let us then conscientiously enquire not only what we do, but whence and why we do it, from what motive and to what end.

Self-inspection is the only means to preserve us from self-conceit. We could not surely so very extravagantly value a being whom we ourselves should not only see, but feel to be so full of faults. Self-acquaintance will give us a far more deep and intimate knowledge of our own errors than we can possibly have, with all the inquisitiveness of an idle curiosity, of the errors of others. We are eager enough to blame them without knowing

knowing their motives. We are no less eager to vindicate ourselves, though we cannot be entirely ignorant of our own. Thus two virtues will be acquired by the same act, humility and candour; an impartial review of our own infirmities, being the likeliest way to make us tender and compassionate to those of others.

Nor shall we be so liable to over-rate our own judgment when we perceive that it often forms such false estimates, is so captivated with trifles, so elated with petty successes, so dejected with little disappointments. When we hear others commend our charity which we know is so cold; when others extol our piety which we feel to be so dead; when they applaud the energies of our faith, which we must know to be so faint and feeble; we cannot possibly be so intoxicated with the applause which never would have been given had the applauder known us as we know, or ought to know ourselves. If we contradict him, it may be only to draw on ourselves the imputation of a fresh virtue,

humility, which perhaps we as little deserve to have ascribed to us as that which we have been renouncing. If we kept a sharp lookout, we should not be proud of praises which cannot apply to us, but should rather grieve at the involuntary fraud of imposing on others, by tacitly accepting a character to which we have so little real pretension. To be delighted at finding that people think so much better of us than we are conscious of deserving, is in effect to rejoice in the success of our own deceit.

We shall also become more patient, more forbearing and forgiving, shall better endure the harsh judgment of others respecting us, when we perceive that their opinion of us nearly coincides with our own real though unacknowledged sentiments. There is much less injury incurred by others thinking too ill of us, than in our thinking too well of ourselves.

It is evident then, that to live at random, is not the life of a rational, much less of an immortal, least of all of an accountable being.

being. To pray occasionally, without a deliberate course of prayer ; to be generous without proportioning our means to our expenditure ; to be liberal without a plan, and charitable without a principle ; to let the mind float on the current of public opinion, lie at the mercy of events for the probable occurrence of which we have made no provision ; to be every hour liable to death without any habitual preparation for it ; to carry within us a principle which we believe will exist through all the countless ages of eternity, and yet to make little enquiry whether that eternity is likely to be happy or miserable—all this is an inconsiderateness which, if adopted in the ordinary concerns of life, would bid fair to ruin a man's reputation for common sense ; yet of this infatuation he who lives without self-examination is absolutely guilty.

Nothing more plainly shews us what weak vacillating creatures we are, than the difficulty we find in fixing ourselves down to the very self-scrutiny we had deliberately resolved

on.. Like the worthless Roman Emperor, we retire to our closet under the appearance of serious occupation, but might now and then be surprised, if not in catching flies, yet in pursuits nearly as contemptible. Some trifles which we should be ashamed to dwell upon at any time, intrudes itself on the moments dedicated to serious thought ; recollection is interrupted ; the whole chain of reflection is broken, so that the scattered links cannot again be united. And so inconsistent are we that we are sometimes not sorry to have a plausible pretence for interrupting the very employment in which we had just before made it a duty to engage. For want of this home acquaintance, we remain in utter ignorance of our inability to meet even the ordinary trials of life with cheerfulness ; indeed by this neglect we confirm that inability.

Nursed in the lap of luxury, we have perhaps an indefinite notion that we have but a loose hold on the things of this world, and of the world itself.—But let some accident take away, not the world, but some trifles

trifle on which we thought we set no value while we possessed it, and we find to our astonishment, that we hold, not the world only, but even this trivial possession with a pretty tight grasp. Such detections of our self-ignorance, if they do not serve to wean, ought at least to humble us.

There is a spurious sort of self-examination which does not serve to enlighten but to blind. A person who has left off some notorious vice, who has softened some shades of a glaring sin, or substituted some outward forms in the place of open irreligion, looks on his change of character with pleasure. He compares himself with what he was, and views the alteration with self-complacency. He deceives himself by taking his standard from his former conduct, or from the character of still worse men, instead of taking it from the unerring rule of Scripture. He looks rather at the discredit than the sinfulness of his former life, and being more ashamed of what is disreputable than grieved at what is vicious, he is, in this state of shallow reformation, more in danger in proportion as he

is more in credit. He is not aware that it is not having a fault or two less will carry him to heaven, while his heart is still glued to the world and estranged from God."

If we ever look into our hearts at all, we are naturally most inclined to it when we think we have been acting right. Here inspection gratifies self-love. We have no great difficulty in directing our attention to an object when that object presents us with pleasing images. But it is a painful effort to compel the mind to turn in on itself, when the view only presents subjects for regret and remorse. This painful duty however must be performed, and will be more salutary in proportion as it is less pleasant. — Let us establish it into a habit to ruminante on our faults. With the recollection of our virtues we need not feed our vanity. They will, if that vanity does not obliterate them, be recorded elsewhere.

We are also most disposed to look at those parts of our character which will best bear it, and which consequently least need it; at those

those parts which afford most self-gratulation. If a covetous man, for instance, examines himself, instead of turning his attention to the peccant part, he applies the probe where he knows it will not go very deep ; he turns from his avarice to that sobriety of which his very avarice is perhaps the source. Another, who is the slave of passion, fondly rests upon some act of generosity, which he considers as a fair commutation for some favorite vice, that would cost him more to renounce than he is willing to part with. We are all too much disposed to dwell on that smiling side of the prospect which pleases and deceives us, and to shut our eyes upon that part which we do not chuse to see, because we are resolved not to quit. Self-love always holds a screen between the superficial self-examiner and his faults. The nominal Christian wraps himself up in forms which he makes himself believe are religion. He exults in what he does, overlooks what he ought to do, nor ever suspects that what is done at all can be done amiss.

As we are so indolent that we seldom examine a truth on more than one side, so we generally take care that it shall be that side which shall confirm some old prejudices. While we will not take pains to correct those prejudices and to rectify our judgment, lest it should oblige us to discard a favorite opinion, we are yet as eager to judge, and as forward to decide, as if we were fully possessed of the grounds on which a sound judgment may be made, and a just decision formed.

We should watch ourselves whether we observe a simple rule of truth and justice, as well in our conversation, as in our ordinary transactions; whether we are exact in our measures of commendation and censure; whether we do not bestow extravagant praise where simple approbation alone is due; whether we do not withhold commendation, where, if given, it would support modesty and encourage merit; whether what deserves only a slight censure as imprudent, we do not reprobate as immoral; whether we do not sometimes affect to over-rate ordinary merit,

merit, in the hope of securing to ourselves the reputation of candor, "that we may on other occasions, with less suspicion, deprecate established excellence. We extol the first because we fancy that it can come into no competition with us, and we derogate from the last because it obviously eclipses us.

Let us ask ourselves if we are conscientiously upright in our estimation of benefits; whether when we have a favour to ask we do not depreciate its value, when we have one to grant we do not aggravate it?

It is only by scrutinizing the heart that we can know it. It is only by knowing the heart that we can reform the life. Any careless observer indeed, when his watch goes wrong, may see that it does so by casting an eye on the dial plate; but it is only the artist who takes it to pieces and examines every spring and every wheel separately, who, by ascertaining the precise causes of the irregularity, can set the machine right, and restore the obstructed movements.

The illusions of intellectual vision would be materially corrected by a close habit of cultivating an acquaintance with our hearts. We fill much too large a space in our own imaginations ; we fancy we take up more room in the world than Providence assigns to an individual who has to divide his allotment with so many millions, who are all of equal importance in their own eyes ; and who, like us, are elbowing others to make room for themselves. Just as in the natural world, where every particle of matter would stretch itself and move out of its place, if it were not kept in order by surrounding particles : the pressure of other parts reduces this to remain in a confinement from which it would escape, if it were not thus pressed and acted upon on all sides. The conscientious practice we have been recommending, would greatly assist in reducing us to our proper dimensions, and in limiting us to our proper place. We should be astonished if we could see our 'real' diminutiveness, and the speck we actually occupy. When shall we learn

learn from our own feelings of how much consequence every man is to himself?

Nor must the examination be occasional but regular. Let us not run into long arrears, but settle our accounts frequently. Little articles will run up to a large amount, if they are not cleared off. Even our *innocent* days, as we may chuse to call them, will not have passed without furnishing their contingent. Our deadness in devotion—our eagerness for human applause—our care to conceal our faults rather than to correct them—our negligent performance of some relative duty—our imprudence in conversation, especially at table—our inconsideration—our driving to the very edge of permitted indulgences—let us keep these, let us keep all our numerous items in small sums. Let us examine them while the particulars are fresh in our memory, otherwise, however we may flatter ourselves that lesser evils will be swallowed up by the greater, we may find when we come to settle the grand account that they will not be . the

the less remembered for not having been recorded.

And let it be one subject of our frequent enquiry, whether, since we last scrutinized our hearts, our secular affairs, or our eternal concerns, have had the predominance there. We do not mean which of them has occupied most of our time, the larger portion of which must, necessarily, to the generality, be absorbed in the cares of the present life ; but on which our affections have been most bent ; and especially how we have conducted ourselves when there has arisen a competition between the interests of both.

'I hat general burst of sins which so frequently rushes in on the consciences of the dying, would be much moderated by previous habitual self-examination. It will not do to repent in 'he lump. The sorrow must be as circumstantial as the sin. Indefinite repentance is no repentance. And it is one grand use of self-inquiry, to remind us that all unforsaken sins are unrepented sins.

To

To a Christian there is this substantial comfort attending a minute self-examination, that when he finds fewer sins to be noted and more victories over temptation obtained, he has a solid evidence of his advancement, which well repays his trouble.

The faithful searcher into his own heart, that "chamber of Imagery," feels himself in the situation of the Prophet *, who being conducted in vision from one idol to another, the spirit, at sight of each, repeatedly exclaims, "here is another abomination!" The prophet being commanded to dig deeper, the further he penetrated the more evils he found, while the spirit continued to cry out, "I will shew thee yet more abominations."

Self-examination by detecting self-love, self-denial by weakening its powers, self-government by reducing its despotism, turns the temper of the soul from its natural bias,

* Ezekiel.

controls the disorderly appetite, and, under the influence of Divine grace, in a good measure restores to the man that dominion over himself, which God at first gave him over the inferior creatures. Desires, passions, and appetites are brought to move somewhat more in their appointed order, subjects not tyrants. What the Stoics vainly pretended to, Christianity effects. It restores man to a dominion over his own will, and in a good measure enthrones him in that empire which he had forfeited by sin.

He now begins to survey his interior, the awful world within; not indeed with self-complacency, but with the control of a Sovereign, he still finds too much rebellion to indulge security, he therefore continues his inspection with vigilance, but without perturbation. He continues to experience a remainder of insubordination and disorder, but this rather solicits to a stricter government than drives him to relax his discipline.

This self-inspection somewhat resembles the correction of a literary performance.

After

After many and careful revivals, though some grosser faults may be done away; though the errors are neither quite so numerous, nor so glaring as at first, yet the critic perpetually perceives faults which he had not perceived before; negligences appear which he had overlooked, and even defects start up which had passed on him for beauties. He finds much to amend, and even to expunge, in what he had before admired. When by rigorous castigation the most acknowledged faults are corrected, his critical acumen, improved by exercise, and a more habitual acquaintance with his subject, still detects and will for ever detect new imperfections. But he neither throws aside his work, nor remits his criticism, which, if it do not make the work perfect, will at least make the author humble. Conscious that if it is not quite so bad as it was, it is still at an immeasurable distance from the required excellence.

Is it not astonishing that we should go on repeating periodically, " Try me, O God," while

while we are yet neglecting to try ourselves ? Is there not something more like defiance than devotion to invite the inspection of Omnipotence to that heart which we ourselves neglect to inspect ? How can a Christian solemnly cry out to the Almighty, “ Seek the ground of my heart, prove me, and examine my thoughts, and see if there be any way of wickedness in me,” while he himself neglects to “ examine his heart,” is afraid of “ proving his thoughts,” and dreads to enquire if there “ be any way of wickedness” in himself, knowing that the enquiry ought to lead to the expulsion.

In our self-inquisition let us fortify our virtue by a rigorous exactness in calling things by their proper names. Self-love is particularly ingenious in inventing disguises of this kind. Let us lay them open, strip them bare, face them, and give them as little quarter as if they were the faults of another. Let us not call wounded pride delicacy. Self-love is made up of soft and sickly sensibilities. Not that sensibility which melts at the

the sorrows of others, but that which cannot endure the least suffering itself. It is alive in every pore where self is concerned. A touch is a wound. It is careless in inflicting pain, but exquisitely awake in feeling it. It defends itself before it is attacked, revenges affronts before they are offered, and resents as an insult the very suspicion of an imperfection.

In order then to unmask our hearts, let us not be contented to examine our vices, let us examine our virtues also, “ those smaller faults.” Let us scrutinize to the bottom those qualities and actions which have more particularly obtained public estimation. Let us enquire if they were genuine in the principle, simple in the intention, honest in the prosecution. Let us ask ourselves if in some admired instances our generosity had no tincture of vanity, our charity no taint of ostentation? Whether, when we did such a right action which brought us credit, we should have persisted in doing it had we foreseen that it would incur censure?

Do

Do we never deceive ourselves by mistaking a constitutional indifference of temper for Christian moderation? Do we never construe our love of ease into deadness to the world? Our animal activity into Christian zeal? Do we never mistake our obstinacy for firmness, our pride for fortitude, our selfishness for feeling, our love of controversy for the love of God, our indolence of temper for superiority to human applause? When we have stripped our good qualities bare; when we have made all due deductions for natural temper, easiness of disposition, self-interest, desire of admiration, when we have pared away every extrinsic appendage, every illegitimate motive, let us fairly cast up the account, and we shall be mortified to see how little there will remain. Pride may impose itself upon us even in the shape of repentance. The humble Christian is grieved at his faults, the proud man is angry at them. He is indignant when he discovers he has done wrong, not so much because his sin offends God, as because it has let him see that

that he is not quite so good as he had tried to make himself believe.

It is therefore more necessary to excite us to the humbling of our pride than to the performance of certain good actions ; the former is more difficult as it is less pleasant. That very pride will of itself stimulate to the performance of many things that are laudable. These performances will reproduce pride as they were produced by it ; whereas humility has no outward stimulus. Divine grace alone produces it. It is so far from being actuated by the love of fame, that it is not humility, till it has laid the desire of fame in the dust.

If an actual virtue consists, as we have frequently had occasion to observe, in the dominion over the contrary vice, humility is the conquest over pride, charity over selfishness, not only a victory over the natural temper, but a substitution of the opposite quality. This proves that all virtue is founded in self-denial, self-denial in self-knowledge, and self-knowledge in self-examination. Pride so insinuates itself in all we do,

do, and say, and think, that our apparent humility has not seldom its origin in pride. That very impatience which we feel at the perception of our faults is produced by the astonishment at finding that we are not perfect. This sense of our sins should make us humble but not desperate. It should teach us to distrust every thing in ourselves, and to hope for every thing from God. The more we lay open the wounds which sin has made, the more earnestly shall we seek the remedy which Christianity has provided.

But instead of seeking for self-knowledge, we are glancing about us for grounds of self-exaltation. We almost resemble the Pharisee, who with so much self-complacency delivered in the catalogue of his own virtues and other men's sins, and, like the Tartars, who think they possess the qualities of those they murder, fancied that the sins of which he accused the Publican would swell the amount of his own good deeds. Like him we take a few items from memory, and a few more from imagination. Instead of pulling down the edifice which pride has raised,

raised, we are looking round on our good works for buttresses to prop it up. We excuse ourselves from the imputation of many faults by alleging that they are common, and by no means peculiar to ourselves. This is one of the weakest of our deceits. Faults are not less personally ours because others commit them. Is it any diminution of our error that others are guilty of the same?

Self-love being a very industrious principle has generally two concerns in hand at the same time. It is as busy in concealing our own defects as in detecting those of others, especially those of the wise and good. We might indeed direct its activity in the latter instance to our own advantage, for if the faults of good men are injurious to themselves, they might be rendered profitable to us, if we were careful to convert them to their true use. But instead of turning them into a means of promoting our own watchfulness, we employ them mischievously in two ways. We lessen our respect for pious characters when we see the infirmities

infirmities which are blended with their fine qualities, and we turn their failings into a justification of our own, which are not like theirs overshadowed with virtues. To admire the excellences of others without imitating them is fruitless admiration, to condemn their errors without avoiding them is unprofitable censoriousness.

When we are compelled by our conscience, to acknowledge and regret any fault we have recently committed, this fault so presses upon our recollection, that we seem to forget that we have any other. This single error fills our mind, and we look at it as through a telescope, which, while it clearly shews the object, confines the sight to that one object exclusively. Others indeed are more effectually shut out, than if we were not examining this. Thus while the object in question is magnified, the others are as if they did not exist.

It seems to be established into a kind of system not to profit by any thing without us, and not to cultivate an acquaintance with

any thing within us. Though we are perpetually remarking on the defects of others, yet when does the remark lead us to study and to root out the same defects in our own hearts? We are almost every day hearing of the death of others, but does it induce us to reflect on death as a thing in which we have an individual concern? We consider the death of a friend as a loss, but seldom apply it as a warning. The death of others we lament, the faults of others we censure, but how seldom do we make use of the one for our own amendment, or of the other for our own preparation?*

It is the fashion of the times to try experiments in the Arts, in Agriculture, in Philosophy. In every science the diligent professor is always afraid there may be some secret which he has not yet attained, some occult principle which would reward the labour of discovery, something even which

* For this hint, and a few others on the same subject, the Author is indebted to that excellent Christian Moralist, M. Nicole.

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when our spiritual enemy ceases to assail. We may be off our guard when there is no longer any temptation without. We may cease our self-denial when there is no more corruption within. We may give the reins to our imagination when we are sure its tendencies will be towards heaven. We may dismiss repentance when sin is abolished. We may indulge selfishness when we can do it without danger to our souls. We may neglect prayer when we no longer need the favour of God. We may cease to praise him when he ceases to be gracious to us.—To discontinue our vigilance at any period short of this will be to defeat all the virtues we have practised on earth, to put to hazard all our hopes of happiness in heaven.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

